NATION

Two NEET candidates end their lives

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

NSE files for Rs 30,000 crore IPO, to be India's biggest-ever

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Ronaldo's Portugal held to a 1-1 draw by Congo

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 19 JUNE 2026 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 3 MUHARRAM 1448 H | Vol 5 | Issue No 158 | Pages: 8

Cong wins 5th MLC seat as BJP, JD(S) cross vote

11 MLAs cross vote in big win for new CM; BJP to act against defectors

MLC POLLS IN NUMBERS

7 seats of Karnataka Legislative Council went to polls

Congress won 5	BJP won 2	JD(S) lost

8 candidates were in the fray	222 MLAs voted	1 vote declared invalid	7 BJP MLAs & 4 JD(S) cross voted

Each candidate needed 28 votes to win

THE CANDIDATES

■Congress picks: BK Hariprasad, Malavalli Shivanna, Thippannappa Kamaknoor, PV Mohan, Vinay Karthik Prakash ■BJP picks: Raghu Kautilya and Lingaraj Patil ■JD(S) pick: Inchara Govindaraju

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

In a major setback for BJP-JD(S) alliance and a big win for Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, at least 11 MLAs cross-voted in Karnataka Legislative Council elections on Thursday, helping Congress sweep all five seats it contested.

BJP won the remaining two seats, while JD(S) candidate Inchara Govindaraju, was defeated despite the alliance's efforts to consolidate votes.

Congress secured 151 votes, 11 more than the 140 required to elect five members, indicating cross-voting by BJP and JD(S) legislators in the secret ballot.

The result is Shivakumar's first major electoral success since taking office and a setback for JD(S) leader and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy, with whom he has been locked in a political battle for dominance in the Old Mysuru region.

Congress' Vinay Karthik Prakash emerged the top scorer with 32 votes. BK Hariprasad and BS Shivanna aka Malavalli Shivanna and Thippannappa Kamakanoor secured 30 votes each, and PV Mohan won with 29 votes.

BJP's Raghu Kautilya won with 29 votes, though one vote cast in his favour was declared invalid. Lingaraj Patil secured 27 votes and was declared elected in the elimination round. Govindaraju managed only 14 votes. The election was held at the Vidhana Soudha as the terms of seven MLCs, including Congress leaders Naseer Ahmed, Tippannappa and Hariprasad, BJP leaders N Nagaraju (MTB), Prathap Simha Nayak K and Sunil Vallyapur, and JD(S)' Govindaraju, are set to end on 30 June. The contest had acquired political significance as both Congress and the BJP-JD(S) alliance feared cross-voting. Legislators of Congress and JD(S) were lodged in private resorts. The JD(S), which has 18 MLAs, fielded Govindaraju after BJP promised six surplus votes from its quota, hoping to capitalise on rumblings of dissent within Congress.

Expelled BJP MLAs ST Somashekar and Shivaram Hebbar openly admitted to voting for Congress candidates. Somashekar said he voted for the ruling party after Shivakumar assured developmental assistance for his constituency. Shivakumar, however, denied approaching MLAs from rival parties. "I don't know who has voted. They have voted on their conscience," he said. Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said that those who betrayed the party will be identified and a decision will be taken on action against them.

He said, "30 votes were allocated to Raghu, out of which one vote is invalid, while 30 votes were allocated to Patil, out of which three were missing. We transferred four surplus votes to JD(S)". —*Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar casts his vote during MLC polls at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Thursday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

PAK BROKERS PEACE

US, IRAN SIGN PEACE DEAL

ISLAMABAD/NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The United States and Iran have signed a 14-point preliminary peace accord, dubbed the "Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding", formally ending more than three months of conflict and paving the way for a broader settlement in West Asia.

The agreement was digitally signed on Wednesday by US President Donald Trump at the Palace of Versailles in France and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in Tehran. Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the document on Thursday as a guarantor of the deal.

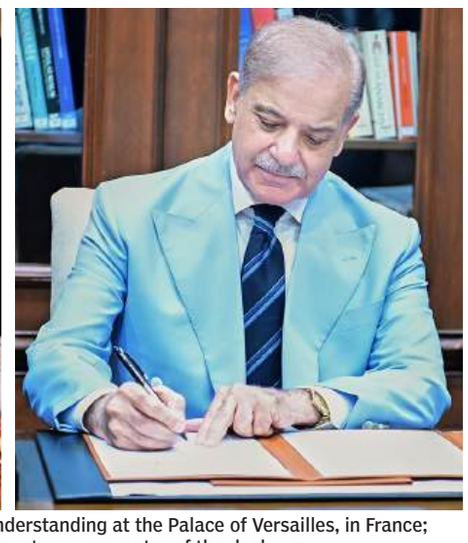
Sharif said the MoU took effect immediately, under which Iran would reopen the Strait of Hormuz and the US would lift its naval blockade. A formal ceremony involving negotiators from the US, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar is scheduled in Switzerland on Friday.

The under-800-word agreement provides for an immediate and permanent end to military operations, including in Lebanon, and commits Iran to diluting its highly enriched uranium under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision. It also envisages immediate oil waivers for Iran and a USD 300 billion reconstruction plan backed by the US and regional partners.

Sharif hailed Trump and Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei for embracing diplomacy and thanked Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Egypt for supporting the peace process.

Meanwhile, Congress said the accord being named the "Islamabad MoU" reflected Pakistan's growing regional influence and exposed shortcomings in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages 5 & 6



US President Donald Trump signs the Iran Memorandum of Understanding at the Palace of Versailles, in France; Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also signed the document as a guarantor of the deal—*PTI*

How can 150M Telegram users' rights be curtailed: HC asks govt

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Delhi High Court on Thursday questioned the Centre's decision to temporarily restrict access to Telegram ahead of the 21 June NEET-UG 2026 re-examination, saying how the rights of 150 million users of the messaging app can be curtailed just because a few of them are taking up the test.

The observations were made by Justice Tejas Karia before reserving the verdict on the plea of Telegram against the temporary ban on the ground that the app may be misused ahead of the NEET-UG retest.

On Thursday, the Centre argued before the high court that Telegram has the potential of misuse by miscreants.

Justice Karia reserved the verdict after hearing arguments from senior advocate Dhruv Mehta, appearing for the app, and Attorney General R Venkataramani and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta who represented the Centre.

The SG referred to the technical aspects of the messaging app and said that a single Telegram account can create up to 40 bots.

"In Telegram, one account user can create 40 bots. While in WhatsApp, it's one bot per user. They have multiplicity encouraging architecture and the bots can further multiply," he said.

"Telegram can offer bot infrastructure which can disseminate information in bulk. This feature is unique as it permits creation of networks with minimal human oversight," he said.

"This platform operates through cloud. Even if they block it and someone does mischief, law enforcement agencies cannot reach the actual user," he said. —*PTI*

Pak to deploy subs in Bay of Bengal, a first since 1971

ISLAMABAD, 18 JUNE

Pakistan is eyeing to deploy its newly inducted Chinese-built PNS Hangor submarine in Bay of Bengal for the first time since the 1971 war, banking on and warming ties with Bangladesh to expand its maritime footprint in the eastern Indian Ocean.

Speaking in Colombo while escorting the submarine home, Commodore Omer Farooq described the Hangor-class vessel as a "game changer" and said Pakistan planned to induct eight submarines of the class, giving it the capability to maintain a presence in the Bay of Bengal.

Built in China and equipped with Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP), the submarine can remain submerged for weeks, making it harder to detect and enabling extended patrols far from Pakistan's traditional operating waters in the Arabian Sea. The development comes amid improving ties between Islamabad and Dhaka following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in 2024. Direct flights and sea links have resumed, bilateral trade has grown, and defence cooperation has expanded through military exchanges and joint exercises. In November 2025, Pakistani frigate PNS Saif made the first port call to Bangladesh since 1971. —*PTI*

6 OF 9 SENA (UBT) MPs SHIFT TO SHINDE CAMP

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The writing appeared to be on the wall for Shiv Sena (UBT) as six of its nine Lok Sabha MPs skipped its parliamentary party meeting here on Thursday, signalling that a formal crossover to the ruling Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde may be only a matter of time.

Only MPs Arvind Sawant, Anil Desai and Rajabhau Waje attended the meeting along with Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut.

The party later issued show-cause notices to the six absentees — Nagesh Patil-Ashtikar, Sanjay Deshmukh, Sanjay Jadhav, Sanjay Dina Patil, Omprakash Rajenimbalkar and Bhausaheb Wakchaure — seeking an explanation within seven days.

Sawant said failure to respond would prompt the party to approach Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla seeking their disqualification. Raut termed the absence a violation of the party whip and warned that the "traitors" would not be spared.

Sources said all six dissident MPs have signed a letter seeking a merger with the Shinde-led Sena and submitted it to Birla. The Sena (UBT) had issued a three-line whip directing MPs to attend Thursday's meeting as part of preparations for possible anti-defection proceedings. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Uddav Thackeray and Eknath Shinde —*PTI*

In Paris, Modi bats for democratisation of AI

PARIS, 18 JUNE

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday made a strong pitch for the democratisation of technology, asserting that artificial intelligence (AI) means "All Inclusive" for India, days after the US imposed restrictions on access to certain AI models.

Addressing the VivaTech 2026 technology forum in Paris, Modi said technology could drive progress only when it is accessible to all.

"India believes that in this era of disruption, technology must deliver for all," he said, adding that AI should improve lives, widen access, spur growth and help sustain a healthy planet. His remarks came days after US-based AI firm Anthropic withdrew its latest AI models, Fable 5 and Mythos 5, to comply with a US directive restricting their use by foreign nationals, raising concerns over global access to advanced AI tools.

Highlighting India's digital transformation, Modi said the country has created the world's largest digital identity system and digital payments platform, with nearly half of all global digital transactions taking place in India.

Referring to his 2021 address at VivaTech during the Covid-19 pandemic, Modi said the world was again facing disruptions and reiterated that "where convention fails, innovation can help".

He said India, with 2 lakh startups, is among the world's most vibrant innovation ecosystems and showcased advances such as 3D-printed rocket engines. —*PTI*

'LIVING IN FEAR' IN UP

Forced to flee house by villagers, claims infant rape survivor's dad

SHAHJAHANPUR, 18 JUNE

The family of an infant who was allegedly raped earlier this month has claimed that villagers broke their house's door and are pressuring them to withdraw the case.

On 9 June, Guddu Sharma, 25, allegedly entered his neighbour's house in a village here and raped a one-year-old girl.

He was shot in both his legs while pursed by the police and arrested within 12 hours.

A member of the infant's family has now alleged that several political leaders, including a BJP MLA, have been visiting their house to lobby for Sharma.

"The local MLA even went to Sharma's house to support him. Since we all belong to the same caste, everyone is busy protecting him," the child's father told PTI.

"Villagers are pressuring us to withdraw the case. They even broke the door of our house, forcing us to leave the village and take refuge in Khutar. We have not registered a complaint regarding the incident as we are terrified," the man said.

The child's mother said the incident has shaken the family.

"This will have a lifelong impact on our child. We want the accused to be hanged so that no one dares to commit such a crime in future," she said.

Shahjahanpur SP Saurav Dixit told PTI on Thursday that the police have received medical reports of both the victim and the accused. The report reveals injuries on the private parts of the accused, he said.

The SP said that before his arrest during the encounter, Guddu had confessed: "I made a mistake, I will not do this again." — *PTI*

Students fume as maggots found in Belagavi hostel food

BELAGAVI, 18 JUNE

Students of a government hostel in Belagavi protested on Wednesday after allegedly finding dead maggots in the food served to them due to which over 30 of them fell sick.

The students said that the Dr BR Ambedkar Post-Matric Hostel at Sangameshwar Nagar has been grappling with poor living conditions for several days, including contaminated food, and the absence of safe drinking water.

They alleged that the hostel has been facing a severe water crisis, making it difficult to meet basic sanitation needs. The students claimed that the warden visits the hostel only once a week and rarely monitors its functioning.

The students said the warden was present at the hostel on Wednesday night when dinner was served. It was during the meal that dead maggots were found on the plates.

The students refused to eat, placed cooking vessels outside the hostel, and demanded that Social Welfare Department officials, including the taluk officer and the Joint Director, visit the hostel. Personnel from the APMC Police Station reached the spot and persuaded the students to withdraw their protest. The officers assured them that a meeting with officials would be convened. — *Salar News*

Woman gets 7 yrs in jail for killing man in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 18 JUNE

Jayashree Pavan Pawar, from Dandeli in Uttara Kannada, was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment and fined Rs 25,000 for murdering Nagaraj Bhimshi Ragipatil, in 2023. The incident occurred near Dora Galli Cross, where Nagaraj was travelling on a motorcycle when Jayashree stopped them and asked for his phone. When Nagaraj questioned why he should hand it over, she became enraged, abused him, and stabbed him in the chest with a knife. Nagaraj was rushed to hospital but died during treatment. The court noted she was under the influence of alcohol at the time. Judge Manjunath Nayak convicted her, and the court recommended compensation for the victim's family. Public Prosecutor Narayan Ari represented the prosecution —*SALAR NEWS*

Making satellites easier than buying B'luru land: Pixxel

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Pixxel Co-Founder and CTO Kshitij Khandelwal has revealed that acquiring land for a satellite manufacturing unit near Bengaluru proved far more challenging than building the satellites themselves. He explained, "Trying to get land for making a satellite factory in the outskirts of BLR has been way more difficult than actually making said satellites," highlighting infrastructure and administrative hurdles faced by aerospace startups. Karnataka Minister M B Patil responded, offering official assistance, stating, "My office will be in touch." Subsequently, Andhra Pradesh extended an invitation, with Minister Nara Lokesh stating, "There's a new investor-friendly destination called Anantapur," and promising to develop aerospace parks. Lokesh instructed the Andhra Pradesh Economic Development Board to contact Pixxel, saying, "@AP_EDB please get in touch. #ChooseSpeedChooseAP." —*ANI*

CM credits guarantees for MLC polls win

Shivakumar thanks legislators from other parties as 11 members cross vote for Congress

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

Karnataka Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday hailed the Congress party winning five seats in Legislative Council elections, saying the outcome reflected legislators' support for the government's welfare programmes and the interests of the people.

There was cross-voting by some opposition MLAs in favour of the ruling Congress candidates.

Addressing a press conference, Shivakumar said, "Today, all legislators have expressed their confidence. Members across party lines have stood in support of us. Along with that, all our legislators have remained united." He said the legislators had effectively endorsed the government's direction and programmes.

"Our strength was already known. We already had the support of two independents, while one member was sitting with us by mutual understanding," he said.

CM DK Shivakumar with MLAs ST Somashekar and Shivaram Hebbar; BJP MLC winners Lingraj Patil and Raghu Kautilya with State BJP President BY Vijayendra; Congress MLA KN Rajanna with former CM Siddaramaiah; Congress Rajya Sabha member-elect Mansoor Ali Khan and Home Minister Priyank Kharge, at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Thursday during the voting for the Legislative Council polls —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

Referring to support received from legislators belonging to other parties, Shivakumar said the voting pattern was evident from the final tally. "I thank them for the confidence they have reposed in me," he said.

On allegations of cross-voting, Shivakumar said he neither sought support from legislators of other parties nor knew who had voted for whom because the election was through a secret ballot.

Congress General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala described the result as a significant endorsement of the Congress' welfare guarantees.s

He said all five Congress candidates won in the first round of counting.

According to Surjewala, the Congress and its allies had an effective strength of 138 legislators in the Assembly but secured support from 151 legislators.

Hariprasad, who was re-elected to the Legislative Council, thanked Congress leadership for reposing faith in the candidates and also thanked former chief minister Siddaramaiah for extending cooperation. Maintaining that the Congress had not sought votes from legislators of other parties, Hariprasad said those who voted for the party had done so according to their conscience. —*PTI*

IS IT ROCKET SCIENCE?

KBG sets 4-6 month deadline to fix ward roads

BENGALURU, 5 JUNE

New Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Thursday said that road estimates and the tendering process for the repair and development of internal and ward roads would be completed the next two months and finish the works within four to six months.

Speaking during a Greater Bengaluru Authority review meeting, he said a special grant of Rs 2,000 crore has been allocated for the improvement of ward roads in the five City Corporations under the GBA and officials have been directed to identify damaged roads, invite short-term tenders and begin repair works immediately.

GBA Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao said the commissioners of the five city corporations have been instructed to prepare lists of deteriorated roads within their jurisdictions.

Taking the monsoon season into account, construction activities will be carried out during dry spells, Gowda said.

GARBAGE

The government will not wait for the new waste management system to be rolled out and will instead focus on improving garbage collection over the next three months, Gowda said. A new tender process for waste collection in the City is currently underway, he said, adding that tenders have been invited for 33 packages, of which six are under litigation. The remaining 27 packages are in the final stages. "Instructions were issued to ensure door-to-door garbage collection. While the task is difficult (it will) eliminate black spots". —*Salar News*

Why drop Veterinary College Metro stop for tunnel road: Surya

BENGALURU, 5 JUNE

Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya attacked the Congress for dropping the the Veterinary College station from Phase 3A of the Red Line (Hebbal-Sarjapura), citing "low ridership". The BJP leader alleged that the Detailed Project Report (DPR) showed that the station was dropped to accommodate "Short Tunnel Project".

Yet, the Veterinary College station, according to the DPR, would have 18,303 daily boardings at by 2031, he said, and asked Byre Gowda to take note. He highlighted that the DPR projects 24,000 passengers per hour per direction by 2033 on the line, whereas the car-only tunnel could hold just 6,500 vehicles per direction. "A station for thousands removed to accommodate a tunnel for perpetuating car dependency. This is not urban planning; it's contractor-driven governance," Surya stated. —*PTI*

Mekedatu dam will benefit TN farmers more than K'taka: DKS

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

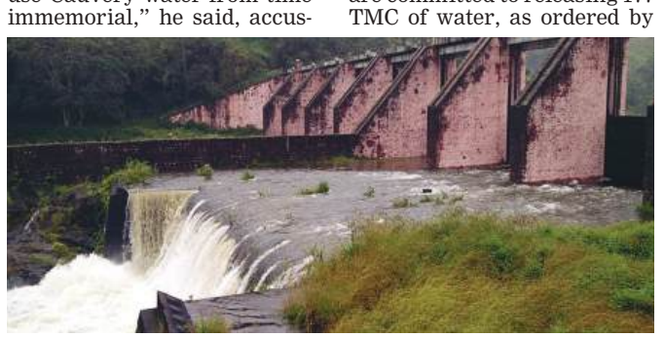
Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said that the proposed Mekedatu balancing reservoir project would benefit Tamil Nadu farmers more than those in Karnataka. He said that Karnataka was committed to releasing 177 TMC of Cauvery water to its neighbour as mandated by the Supreme Court.

His comments came after Tamil Nadu Governor RV Arlekar's address to the state assembly, where the latter called for a halt to the proposed dam. Arlekar had noted that the Cauvery river is the main source of water for farmers in Tamil Nadu's Cauvery delta region.

"Tamil Nadu has the right to use Cauvery water from time immemorial," he said, accusing Karnataka of only releasing surplus water instead of the "due share", despite a Supreme Court ruling.

"If this (Mekedatu) project is implemented, farmers' livelihood will be severely affected. (Tamil Nadu) is taking necessary legal measures to halt this and to get water for Tamil Nadu at the right time," the Governor said. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay has also sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention on Karnataka's proposed Detailed Project Report (DPR).

"Mekedatu (project) is not close to my heart. It is the heart of the entire South India. Mekedatu is a project that will help Tamil Nadu more than Karnataka," Shivakumar responded. "We are committed to releasing 177 TMC of water, as ordered by the Supreme Court. We have to protect Tamil Nadu's farmers... Last year, more than 400 TMC of water flowed into the sea. Who is responsible for that?"



We will not use even a single bucket of water from this project for irrigation (in Karnataka). It will be used only for the drinking water supply to Bengaluru. Bengaluru's population is increasing, and we cannot bring water from the Krishna. Cauvery is the only option before us

-DK Shivakumar, Chief Minister

Shivakumar claimed that Tamil Nadu politics has revolved around Cauvery for the past 40 to 50 years.

"I do not want to interfere in their politics," he quipped.

He also said that he was open to talk to Tamil Nadu leaders "any time" as "we are all Indians" and both states "depend on the save river, the same water".

The project aims to provide drinking water to Bengaluru. It involves constructing a dam on the Cauvery River near its confluence with the Arkavathi River in the Ramanagara district at Kanakapura, Shivakumar's home district. It includes a power station designed to generate 400 MW of hydroelectricity. —*PTI*

Why is a Dalit HM concerned about the RSS? asks BJP MP

BJP MP Ramesh Jigajinagi—*PTI*

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

BJP MP Ramesh Jigajinagi asked why a Dalit man should be concerned about the functioning of the RSS as Home Minister Priyank Kharge has sought details about the "body of individuals"" functioning.

"Is it his job to ask such questions about RSS? Whoever came in the way of RSS did not survive," Jigajinagi, who himself is a Dalit, said at a presser in in Vijayapura. "My question is – why does this Dalit man need to be concerned about the RSS?"

He said that Priyank should be grateful that he got the post due to his father, AICC President and former Karnataka home minister, Mallikarjun Kharge's hard work. Priyank should now seek to do good work and build a name for himself.

Hinduism is very different from the RSS. The principles of RSS contradict the principles of the Hindu religion. In fact, the Hindu religion is the most liberal, inclusive, accommodating, and sacred religion. RSS is an exclusionary, targeting and violent organisation. How can RSS represent Hindu Dharma?

-Rizwan Arshad, Congress MLA

Priyank hit back at the statement.

"Is it a word of caution, advising Dalits not to associate with the RSS, which believes in the fundamentals of a hierarchical social order?" he asked the BJP MP. Priyank asked if Jigajinagi was making statements out of fear of the RSS, or to "intimidate me".

He also questioned whether Jigajinagi believed that Dalits were incapable of bringing the RSS onto the constitutional path —*PTI*

Yaduveer flags 'doc shortage' after Mysuru Jayadeva deaths

MYSURU, 18 JUNE

Mysuru BJP MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Wadiyar alleged a doctor shortage in Mysuru's Jayadeva Hospital after people sounded alarms over 11 patients dying in a single day.

The hospital had said that there was nothing unusual about the deaths, stating that the patients who passed away on Tuesday were admitted in a critical condition.

However, Yaduveer stated on X on Wednesday claimed that "The Director (Dr HB Dinesha) has stated that doctors are working at 'double capacity,' which is clear evidence that the system has reached a breaking point and is collapsing beyond its limits".

He alleged that "that administrative shortcomings are causing a life-threatening staff shortage" at the government institute.

Yaduveer claimed that the hospital had said that junior doctors were sometimes unavailable due to exams.

"It is impossible to run a premier cardiac care institution on such ad-hoc arrangements and overworked staff," he stated.

"The full responsibility for this lies with the governing board and the state government," he added.

He called for the State government's intervention to safeguard the lives of Mysuru residents and those of the surrounding districts who depend on the hospital. —*Salar News*

Bhatkal Hindu activists stop car with Hindu-Muslim couple

KARWAR, 18 JUNE

A reported act of vigilantism in Bhatkal, Uttara Kannada, has led to protests and a police FIR against Hindu organisation leaders. The incident occurred late evening on the Bhatkal-Sagar Road when the activists intercepted a car carrying a Muslim youth and a Hindu woman, suspecting the woman was being taken to an unknown destination.

The group questioned the occupants; the woman was later sent home, while the Muslim youth was handed over to police. The FIR has sparked strong opposition from Hindu organisations, who argue it was unjustified since the woman was returned safely and the youth was handed over without harm. Hundreds gathered at Bhatkal Town police station, protesting and demanding an explanation.

Authorities have launched an investigation, but police have not yet disclosed details about the relationship between the woman and the youth or the specific charges. Police stated, "Bhatkal being a sensitive area, they had to take immediate action, but they are investigating the matter in detail." — *PTI*

LAUNCH 3 DAY CAMPAIGN

Citizen groups and the coming of SIR

BENGALURU, 18 JUNE

With the announcement by the election commission of India, to conduct the Phase 3 of the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roles in 16 states which include Karnataka-it is up to the civil society volunteers to create awareness about the process among the citizens of the state.

Volunteers from citizens' initiative-my vote, my right, have begun a three-day campaign on the streets of Bengaluru to inform the public about the SIR and to make sure that no citizen of India is disenfranchised during the revision of the electoral lists.

Some of the topics that are covered by the volunteers, who are speaking to the common man on the street are:

How do we vote?

Where do we get our names registered?

What do we do if our names are missing?

What are the documents you can submit as proof?

What if your name has been misspelt or there is a discrepancy in your date of birth?

What if you have moved homes, which are in different assembly constituencies?

What, if you, as a woman have married and moved to a different assembly constituency since 2002- the year which is being used as the base year to map your citizenship?

It may be recalled that in the last two phases of the SIR across the 22 states, more than 7.5 crore people had lost their right to vote. While the Supreme Court of India has upheld the validity of the SIR exercise, thus freeing the Election Commission of India from all legal and constitutional powers, it has also paved the way for the ECI to refer those whose names have been deleted from the rolls post-SIR to 'a competent authority' under the Citizenship Act, 1955 for adjudication, thereby putting a question mark on the citizenship of those who were disenfranchised. —*Salar News*

IN LETTER TO GUV, ACTIVIST FLAGS RS 73L BRIBE TO RAICHUR OFFICIAL

RAICHUR, 18 JUNE

Social activist Dinesh Kallahalli has urged Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot to order an independent probe into alleged corruption in Karnataka's urban development sector, citing a viral video purportedly showing a town planning officer demanding a Rs 73.6 lakh bribe for layout approval. The officer, Sharanappa Madivalar of the Lingsugur Town Planning Authority, is allegedly heard discussing the payment and claiming that a share would go to "the Minister."

Kallahalli has sought verification of the video's authenticity and demanded that the investigation extend beyond a single official. He also alleged that complaints relating to corruptionsurfaced during the tenure of Transport Minister Byrathi Suresh, who earlier held the Urban Development portfolio. —*Salar News*

CLASSIFIEDS

CLOSING DOWN SALE
RAYMOND DISCOUNT SHOP
PICK ANY ITEM Rs. 500/- only
2 Nos. Raymond T/W Pant Pc
2 Nos. Raymond Shirt Pc
RAYMOND SUIT Length (3.75 MT) Rs. 1000 ONLY
AT NEW M.N. Next to K.F.C
DISPENSARY Rd. OFF COMMERCIAL
BANGALORE -1 Mob: 9343 03 7218

—ANI

SP MLA faces FIR for post targeting Kangana Ranaut

PRATAPGARH, 18 JUNE

A case has been registered against Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA Rakesh Kumar Verma for making alleged objectionable comments about BJP MP and actress Kangana Ranaut, police said. Cyber Police Station in-charge Rajeev Kumar Tiwari confirmed a viral video showing Verma's remarks. BJP Yuva Morcha district president Anshuman Singh lodged a complaint, accusing Verma of inappropriate language. Police registered an FIR under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including Section 352, and the Information Technology Act. Further investigation is ongoing, police stated. —*PTI*

DMK files plaint over X posts targeting Stalin

CHENNAI, 18 JUNE

The DMK has lodged a criminal complaint with police and cybercrime authorities against an X account for circulating false and offensive content against party President MK Stalin. The complaint was filed by S Natarajan, a 51-year-old DMK cadre, against the handle "Kanchipuram Vijay FaN" (@VfcKanchipuram). The account posted a photo of Stalin with abusive Tamil expressions, claiming he had taken a loan and accused the government of pushing Tamil Nadu into debt. Natarajan said the content was misleading, damaging Stalin's reputation, and called for the content's removal and legal action. —*PTI*

Govt to issue 3 cr ration cards after deletions

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Union Food Minister Pralhad Joshi announced that nearly 3 crore additional ration cards could be issued after states removed ineligible beneficiaries from PDS lists. The deletions of 2.21 crore were made by states based on their criteria, not central directives. The Centre had identified 8.51 crore ineligible beneficiaries, including deceased persons and income-tax payers, and shared this list with states. Joshi emphasised that digitisation enabled this process, and states can now add eligible beneficiaries. The current beneficiaries total 79 crore, with the target to distribute free foodgrain to 80 crore people. —*PTI*

—ANI

Some actor imitated me, says Mann over video

CHANDIGARH, 18 JUNE

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday reiterated that it was not him in the objectionable video over which Sikh clergy issued an edict against him, saying some actor had imitated him. Mann also cited reports of two labs, showing that the man in the footage was someone else. The Akal Takht on Monday declared Mann 'Guru Dokhi' (anti-Guru) and 'Khalsa Panth virodhi' (anti-Khalsa Panth) over the video.Mann said he was not in the video, claiming that some actor was imitating him in it with hair style like himself. Citing findings of reports of the two labs in connection with the objectionable video, he said 1,191 frames in that video were checked."Not even a single frame matched the front or sides of my face or my physique," said Mann. He said there is a difference of one inch in his height compared to the individual seen in the video. —*PTI*

Cong merger 'fear' led to Sena UBT revolt

Maharashtra Police provide Y-Plus security to the six rebels who are switching over

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Fears that the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) could eventually merge with the Congress prompted six rebel Lok Sabha MPs to revolt and seek a merger with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, sources said on Thursday.

The dissident MPs met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in Delhi and submitted a letter claiming the Sena (UBT) leadership had drifted from the party's core ideology and that senior leaders were planning to merge with the Congress, an ally in the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi.

The rebels also sought seats in the Lok Sabha alongside the seven MPs of the Shinde faction. With six of the Sena (UBT)'s nine Lok Sabha MPs backing the move, the group has crossed the two-thirds threshold required to avoid disqualification under the anti-defection law.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs Sanjay Raut and Arvind Sawant during a press conference, in New Delhi on Thursday —*PTI*

The six MPs are Sanjay Jadhav, Sanjay Deshmukh, Omraje Nimbalkar, Bhausaheb Wakchaure, Nagesh Patil-Ashtikar and Sanjay Dina Patil.

Sources said resentment had been building for months, with the MPs unhappy over Thackeray's alleged lack of engagement with their constituencies and inadequate electoral support. They also complained that even Aaditya Thackeray remained inaccessible.

The rebellion unfolded through late-night flights to Delhi, secret meetings with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and a stay at a Noida hotel before the MPs met the Speaker on 17 June.

- The dissident MPs met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and submitted a letter claiming the Sena (UBT) leadership had drifted from the party's core ideology

Amid protests by Sena (UBT) workers, Maharashtra Police have provided Y-Plus security cover to all six MPs. The move followed threats from party workers and leaders, including warnings that rebel MPs would be attacked or socially boycotted if they switched sides without resigning.

The rebels are expected to meet Shinde on June 20 and publicly explain their decision to break away. —*Salar News*

'National Defectors Alliance won't get 2/3rd majority'

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh on Thursday accused Home Minister Amit Shah of orchestrating defections in opposition parties to secure a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, dubbing the NDA the "National Defectors Alliance".

He said the Congress leadership was in touch with allies and would resist Shah's "nefarious" attempts to secure a two-thirds majority "by hook or crook".

Ramesh claimed Shah suffered a "humiliation" on 17 April when the government's Constitution Amendment Bill on delimitation failed to secure the required two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha despite winning 298 votes.

"He expected the Bill to pass and had assured the Prime Minister. But opposition unity ensured its defeat," Ramesh told PTI, alleging Shah has since launched a "massive programme" to destabilise opposition.

Congress leader alleged that various inducements are being offered to opposition MPs to switch sides, calling it "an assault on the Constitution and democracy". He accused Shah of employing the "dirtiest of tricks" to avenge the setback and said the Home Minister was trying to create confusion and sow dissension among opposition ranks. —*PTI*

Thanks to cross-voting, NDA wins Jharkhand RS polls

RANCHI/AIZAWL, 18 JUNE

Amid cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha elections in Jharkhand, NDA-backed Independent candidate Parimal Nathwani on Thursday won one of the state's two seats, while the ruling Jharkhand Mukti Morcha's (JMM) Baidyanath Ram secured the other.

Nathwani polled the required 28 votes, defeating Congress nominee Pranav Jha, who secured 20 votes. Ram won comfortably with 30 votes. Three ballots — two from the BJP and one from the Congress — were declared invalid.

The BJP-led NDA has only 24 MLAs in the 81-member Assembly, four short of the required strength, while the ruling INDIA bloc commands 56 members, making Nathwani's victory possible only through cross-voting.

The Congress alleged "horse trading", accusing the BJP of using money power to secure Nathwani's victory. Jharkhand Congress in-charge K Raju blamed alliance partners RJD and CPI(ML) Liberation for the defeat, claiming they failed to back the Congress candidate. BJP leaders rejected the allegations, saying legislators voted according to their conscience.

BJP-backed candidate Parimal Nathwani at the Vidhan Sabha during the voting for Rajya Sabha election 2026, in Ranchi —*ANI*

Meanwhile, in Mizoram, the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) secured its first-ever Rajya Sabha representation with party leader K Laltluangkima winning the lone Upper House seat.

Laltluangkima secured 26 votes against the opposition Mizo National Front's Zothansangi Hmar, who received 10 votes. Three legislators abstained, while one ZPM MLA could not vote due to ill health. —*PTI*

Cops grill ex-WB minister in Messi event case

KOLKATA, 18 JUNE

Former West Bengal Sports Minister Aroop Biswas was interrogated for over three hours by Bidhannagar Police regarding alleged irregularities during the 2025 Lionel Messi football event, officials confirmed. Biswas arrived at Bidhannagar South Police Station at 9.55am after missing two previous summons and in accordance with a Calcutta High Court order granting him conditional immunity from coercive action. He left the station around 1.15pm in a vehicle with tinted glasses.

Biswas was summoned again on 22 June with relevant documents. The case originated from a complaint by organiser Shatadru Dutta, who accused Biswas of ticket black-marketing, extortion, cheating, and criminal intimidation related to the December event at Salt Lake Stadium, which ended in violence over alleged ticketing irregularities.

Dutta, who spent 37 days in jail, alleged that nearly 22,000 tickets were sold illegally. He claimed Biswas used his influence to manipulate the event. Biswas denied involvement in financial irregularities, asserting he had no role in the financial side of the programme.

Dutta claimed Messi's communication team held Biswas responsible for stadium violence, though police have not confirmed this. —*PTI*

Calcutta HC refuses interim stay on Bengal LoP row

KOLKATA, 18 JUNE

The Calcutta High Court refused an interim order on the West Bengal Assembly Speaker Rathindra Bose's decision to appoint Ritabrata Banerjee as Leader of Opposition. TMC legislator Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay challenged the decision. The matter would be re-heard on 28 July. The court's decision lets Banerjee and other rebel TMC office-bearers to continue during the ongoing assembly session ending on 25 June.

The Speaker's approval included Banerjee as LoP, with Javed Khan, Sandipan Saha, Sabina Yeasmin, and Seuli Saha as deputy leaders. During proceedings, the court questioned the procedure followed by the Speaker, noting conflicting proposals from the same party, and asked whether he decided suo motu or should have called the House to prove majority. Supporters of Banerjee claim backing from over 58 of 80 MLAs, with Saha calling this a "moral victory." Saha stated. —*PTI*

TN sees uninterrupted Governor's address after 3 yrs

CHENNAI, 18 JUNE

Tamil Nadu Governor RV Arlekar's maiden address to the Tamil Nadu Assembly on Thursday was free of controversies almost after three years. He detailed the TVK admin's blueprint for Tamil Nadu. He stressed steps will be taken to ensure fair devolution of funds from the Centre.

The governor himself acknowledged the disruption-free proceedings. The Vijay-led government will take the fight to the SC to get a fair deal on devolution of funds, Arlekar said. The government also announced an unwavering commitment to rooting out corruption.

In his 37-minute address to the maiden session of the 17th Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, the governor said a key focus will be to ensure all departmental procurements and public tenders are conducted with transparency. He announced a crackdown on the mining sector.

Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar delivers his inaugural address at the 17th Legislative Assembly, in Chennai, on Thursday —*PTI*

The session commenced at 10 am for the customary address by the Governor with the rendition of "Tamil Thaai Vazhthu" (state anthem) followed by the National Anthem, a break from the convention where the National Anthem is after the governor's address.

The Governor made it clear that the Vijay admin will continue the policy followed by DMK and AIADMK admins on issues like the 2-language policy and state rights. He said the government will hold a "Social Justice Survey." — *PTI*

3 detained for petrol bomb attack on RSS office in Ranchi

RANCHI, 18 JUNE

Three individuals with suspected terror links to Pakistan were arrested for allegedly hurling petrol bombs at the RSS office in Ranchi. During a gunfight while attempting to escape police custody, one suspect sustained bullet injuries. The two accused were detained from Lohardaga late Wednesday, with their vehicle seized, and a third suspect was apprehended today.

The RSS claimed petrol bombs were thrown early Wednesday, prompting a special investigation team (SIT). Ranchi DSP KV Raman confirmed that the injured suspect, Saif Ansari alias Rohit, was shot in the leg during a brief encounter after snatching a police weapon and firing multiple rounds near a toll plaza.

Police are investigating after CCTV footage captured two suspects —*SCREENGRAB*

Police suspect terror links with ISI or TTH; shards of glass bottles recovered from the scene were examined, suspected to contain petrol, but no explosive devices were found. BJP leader Raghubar Das condemned the attack, describing it as an outcome of "vote bank and appeasement policy" and criticised the law and order situation in the state.

Das visited the RSS office and questioned the government's response to rising violence, emphasising it was "an attack on nationalism." —*PTI*

US envoy calls on Shah; discusses narcotics, terror

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The US Ambassador to India, Sergio Gor, met Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Thursday. The two discussed enhancing cooperation to combat terrorism, narcotic smuggling and to bring criminals to justice.

In a post on X, Gor said the discussions focused on protecting people from narcotics and on securing borders.

Gor met Shah shortly after arriving in India from the G7 Summit in Evian, France.

Gor termed the meeting fruitful and said, "Lots of positive outcomes between the United States and India!"

India and the US held wide-ranging discussions during the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Trump.

Gor highlighted in a post on X that the two leaders reviewed the progress achieved under the India-US COMPACT (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology) since their meeting in Washington DC in February 2025.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah during a meeting with US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor, in New Delhi. —*PTI*

They welcomed developments in defence, energy, and bilateral trade. — *Agencies*

'CHHATRON KI GOONJ'

Rahul launches edu reform campaign

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday launched a signature campaign to amplify issues about the nation's education system, such as paper leaks and high fees, asserting that it is a platform for students to make demands directly to the government.

In a post on X, Gandhi posted a link to the campaign where students can share ideas and sign a petition.

"If you've suffered because of paper leaks, exam issues, or high fees, if this education system has shattered your dreams, if your family has invested lifetime savings in your education, then 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' is your voice," he said in the post.

Gandhi noted that this initiative goes beyond just a campaign; it is a platform for students to raise issues such as the need for affordable education, fair examinations, and dignified employment opportunities.

"Join the movement: Click the link below. Fill in your name and share your ideas. Sign the petition -- that's it," Gandhi said, urging the youth to sign up for this movement. "More the signatures, louder the goonj!" he added.

Lok Sabha LoP Rahul Gandhi speaks during the 'Chhatron Ki Goonj' rally, as part of the Congress party's campaign on paper leaks and youth issues, in Kota, Rajasthan, on Thursday —*PTI*

His appeal for participation in the campaign followed a day after he interacted with students at a convention in Kota, Rajasthan.

During this interaction, he described India's education system as a "rejection system" rather than a selection system, claiming it places an excessive financial burden and causes significant stress to students and middle-class families.

Addressing the gathering in Kota, known for its coaching centres, Gandhi said the current education structure is "extremely stressful and unfair." — *PTI*

Brake jam sparks smoke on Ranthambore Exp

INDORE, 18 JUNE

Smoke billowed from the wheels of a general coach of the Ranthambore Express due to brake friction after the brakes jammed en route from Indore to Jodhpur. Railway officials confirmed it was a technical fault, not a fire. Railway staff used a fire extinguisher to control the situation near Luni Richha station in the Kota division, and all passengers remained safe. Videos showed thick white smoke and passengers rushing out in panic. The brake block was repaired, and the train resumed its journey later. Ratlam divisional public relations officer Mukesh Kumar explained, "The brake block jammed, causing smoke due to friction. This was not a fire incident, but a technical fault."—*PTI*

—PTI

'Godman' arrested in Pune for rape, torture

PUNE, 18 JUNE

Police arrested a self-styled godman, Radhamohan Mishra, and seven aides, including six women, for allegedly sexually assaulting, torturing, and exploiting a woman over years. The victim was subjected to electric shocks, forced to consume urine, and repeatedly assaulted. The complaint was filed on 16 June, leading to the FIR and arrests. Police seized eight laptops, 19 hard disks, DVDs, mobile phones, and cash worth Rs 6.5 lakh, plus gold and silver valued over Rs 15 lakh from Mishra's ashram in Kharadi. The victim's family had been associated with Mishra for more than two decades. Police suspect more victims and continue investigations. The ashram has been sealed, and efforts are underway to identify others involved in the crime. —*PTI*

3 Ah'bad medicos suspended for ragging

AHMEDABAD, 18 JUNE

Three second-year PG students of the city's BJ Medical College have been suspended for six months to one year for allegedly ragging first-year resident doctors, Gujarat Health Minister Praful Pansheriya said on Thursday. The action was taken based on a report submitted by the government-run college's anti-ragging committee, Pansheriya said in a statement. Another complaint about second-year PG students of the Orthopaedics Department ragging 13 first-year students at the Government Medical College in Bhavnagar was also being treated with utmost seriousness, he said. Pansheriya said the complaint of ragging of first-year students by resident Post Graduate students of the Orthopaedic Department at the BJ Medical College in Ahmedabad has been taken very seriously. —*PTI*

SC refuses interim stay on CBSE's language policy

To hear plea on 14 July along with other CBSE cases

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The Supreme Court refused to pass an interim order on a plea challenging the implementation of a CBSE policy mandating the study of three languages, including two native Indian languages, for Class 9 students from the 2026-27 academic session.

Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana tagged the plea filed by the NGO 'Friends of People for Active Democracy' with similar petitions pending on the issue.

"We cannot pass a single-line order today. This matter was argued at length. There is no question of interim protection," the bench said as it ordered the tagging of the matter on Thursday.

During the brief hearing, the counsel appearing for the NGO submitted that they are not challenging the three-language policy per se but just the implementation part of it.

CJI Kant then questioned the NGO's name, Friends of People For Active Democracy, and asked in a lighter vein if that kind of nomenclature was meant to create fear in the mind of the court or the people.

The counsel replied, "No, my lord. That's the name of the trust. It's was set up in 2013," and submitted that the CBSE was required to issue detailed guidelines by 15 June.The bench, however, listed the matter for hearing on 14 July along with other pending petitions. On 27 May, the SC agreed to examine the plea challenging a CBSE policy mandating the study of three languages and issued notices to the Centre, the CBSE and the NCERT and sought com replies within two weeks.

According to a recent circular issued by the CBSE, the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students from 1 July. — PTI

The study of 3 languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students from 1 July—*PTI*

Protect all forests, eco-systems across country, says SC

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The SC said there was a need to protect forests across India, noting that some states like Jharkhand have natural ecosystems which must be preserved. The observations came from CJI Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana while hearing a plea filed by the Jharkhand Pollution Control Board (JSPCB).

The SC was hearing a petition challenging an order of the Jharkhand HC.

The HC had in April passed orders about consent for stone mining near forests.

In January, the HC had directed that no permission should be granted for stone mining or crushers within a km of forests. The HC had passed the order in January after hearing a petition challenging an order issued by the JSPCB which reduced the distance for setting up stone mines and crushers near forests from 400-500 metres to 250 metres. — *PTI*

OVER PAPER LEAK

Two NEET candidates end their lives

CHENNAI, 18 JUNE

A 19-year-old NEET candidate ended her life in Coimbatore district, triggering protests against NEET and reigniting the state's long-standing demand for exemption from the medical entrance examination. Meanwhile, in Ahmedabad, a 17-year-old boy scheduled to appear for NEET committed suicide by jumping from his sixth-floor flat early on Thursday, police said.

Coimbatore police identified the student as **Anunkeerthana**, who had appeared for NEET twice. Police said no suicide note was recovered. The incident sparked protests in Coimbatore. The DMK has also announced a protest reiterating its demand for NEET exemption for TN.

Tamil Nadu has opposed NEET, arguing that it gives affluent students who can afford private coaching an unfair advantage. The TN Assembly had passed a bill seeking exemption from NEET, but it did not receive presidential assent.

In Ahmedabad, a 17-year-old boy scheduled to appear in NEET (UG) re-exam committed suicide by jumping from his sixth-floor flat on Thursday. No suicide note was recovered."Around 2.55 am, the boy, a NEET candidate, jumped from the sixth-floor balcony of his apartment in Tragad," inspector Vaghela said.

The teenager was taken to a hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The boy lived with his mother and brother, while his father, an advocate, is in Surat after the couple's separation . — *Agencies*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

NEET candidates must ignore rumours: NTA

NEW DELHI, 18 JUN

The National Testing Agency (NTA) urged NEET-UG candidates to remain calm and focus on their preparation, asserting that extensive arrangements have been made to ensure a fair examination.

In a message on X, the agency said the re-examination will be conducted on Sunday as scheduled and asked candidates not to be swayed by rumours of postponement. "Rely only on official communication from NTA," it said.

The agency also warned against malpractice, saying, "Any attempt at malpractice will be dealt with firmly because protecting honest students is exactly what this is about."

Referring to the cancellation of the original examination conducted on 3 May, the NTA said the decision was taken in the interest of candidates and that lessons from that had been used to strengthen the examination process.

The National Testing Agency also highlighted the availability of mental health support for students facing stress.

"If the pressure feels heavy, please know you are not alone. The MANAS mental-health helpline (14416) is available, and support is there for anyone who needs it. Reaching out is a sign of strength and not weakness," the message said.

The NTA appealed to parents, teachers and the public to help keep students remain calm. — PTI

Amid Ebola fears, Keralam isolates traveller from Sudan

KOTTAYAM, 18 JUNE

A woman who arrived from South Sudan was shifted to Kottayam Medical College for an Ebola test after she developed fever, health officials said on Thursday.

Health officials said, the woman, who had returned from South Sudan, approached a private hospital in Pala here on Wednesday with fever.

Considering her recent arrival from an African country, the hospital informed the Health Department, which decided to shift her to Kottayam Medical College, officials said.

Health officials said she has been admitted to an isolation ward at the Kottayam Medical College.

Blood samples of the woman have been collected and sent to a laboratory to determine whether she has been infected with the Ebola virus, officials said.

The Health Department had already issued an alert to hospitals across Kerala regarding Ebola cases and has decided to monitor people arriving from African countries.

Health Minister K Muraleedharan told reporters in Thrissur that the patient, whose family is from Pala in Kottayam district, was admitted to a private hospital.

Muraleedharan said the Superintendent of Kottayam Medical College had informed him that there was nothing alarming at this stage. "We are preparing the contact list of the patient. The test results are expected soon," he said.

Early symptoms of the disease are fever, sore throat, headache, fatigue and body pain. — *PTI*

Bihar woman gangraped, stone retrieved from pvts

KOTTAYAM, 18 JUNE

A 30-year-old woman was allegedly gangraped in Bihar's Begusarai district, with doctors treating her reportedly retrieving a cartridge-like object, a stone and a piece of wood from her privates days after the incident, officials said on Thursday.

The victim said the incident took place in Chakiya area on 11 June when she stepped out to attend nature's call. The victim said five men dragged her out and raped her.

Begusarai SP Maneesh said, "A manhunt has been launched to nab the suspects."

The victim said the suspects inflicted injuries on her with a sharp object. — PTI

ED arrests ex-Andhra min's son in liquor case

HYDERABAD, 18 JUNE

The Enforcement Directorate arrested Karumuri Sunil Kumar, son of former Andhra Pradesh minister and YSRCP leader Karumuri Nageswara Rao, on Thursday in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in the transport of liquor during the YSRCP rule, officials said.

The premises of the father-son duo were raided by the ED a few days back.

K Sunil Kumar has been arrested under the PMLA after he was questioned, officials said. K Nageswara Rao served as the civil supplies minister in the government led by Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The probe pertains to an allegation that the accused persons caused wrongful loss to of Rs 195.33 crore to the exchequer through irregularities in the transport of liquor. A case was registered by the ED under the PMLA in May to probe these charges.

- The probe pertains to an allegation that the accused caused a loss to of Rs 195.33 crore to the exchequer through irregularities in transporting liquor

The ED, after the 11 June raids, had arrested former state beverages corporation MD Donthireddy Vasudeva Reddy and the prime accused in the case, Kasireddy Raja Sekhar Reddy. — *PTI*

Villages in Manipur's Kangpokpi district searched, arms seized

IMPHAL, 18 JUNE

Security forces launched wide-ranging search operations in four villages within Manipur's Kangpokpi district, resulting in the seizure of arms and ammunition and the dismantling of bunkers, police said on Thursday. Operations were carried out at Leilon Vaiphei, Leilon Khunou, L Munlui, and Konsakhul villages, close to recent violent incidents.

During the operation on Wednesday, at least thirty illegal bunkers were destroyed. Leilon Vaiphei, a Kuki-Zo village, is where six Naga men abducted on 13 May were later found dead near the village on 10 June. Reports of firing have also emerged from Leilon Munlui and Konsakhul in recent months.

The security forces recovered 11 12-bore SBBLs, 294 rounds of live ammunition, gunpowder packages, 34 empty cases, and six bulletproof vests. Additionally, thirty bunkers and strategic camps were dismantled, and four individuals detained for verification.

Security forces recovered 11 12-bore SBBLs, 294 rounds of live ammo, gunpowder, 34 empty cases, and six bulletproof vests—*X/MANIPURPOLICE*

The forces also destroyed an unauthorized check post and bunker at S Nabil and Loilamkoi villages. The police earlier stated that the Director General of Police was personally overseeing operations to curb violence. Former Chief Minister N Biren Singh welcomed the measures, expressing confidence that peace would soon be restored. —*PTI*

ED raids Keralam hospitals in organ donation racket

KOCHI, 18 JUNE

The ED on Thursday searched hospitals and residences across Keralam in connection with a money laundering probe linked to a racket that allegedly used forged documents to facilitate illegal organ donations, sources said.

The searches were conducted at five hospitals and residences in Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam districts.

ED sources said the agency launched its investigation based on FIRs registered by the police against a racket involved in facilitating illegal organ donations.

Sources said, a preliminary probe revealed that the accused were acting as intermediaries between organ donors, recipients, and hospitals, charging hefty sums to arrange donations.

The searches were conducted at hospitals that allegedly had financial transactions with the prime accused, Najeeb, officials said.

In Kochi, searches were held in three locations, officials said.

The raids began at 6 am, and investigators are examining bank transactions and medical records connected to organ donations, they said.

Police found that the organ donation process involves complex verification procedures that require certificates and clearances from the police, local bodies, doctors, MLAs, and MPs.

The accused allegedly used forged documents to bypass these procedures.

The FIRs says the gang had been active since August 2023 and allegedly forged letterheads of two private hospitals in Kochi, police clearance certificates, and letters in the names of MLAs, MPs, and police officers. The Police alleged that the gang forged recommendation letters of doctors. The key accused, Najeeb of Kasaragod, was arrested by the police from UP last month. — *PTI*

KERALAM PROTESTS POWER CUTS

Amid outage fans watch FIFA at KSEB office

KOCHI, 18 JUNE

Football passion runs deep in Keralam, where fans often go to extraordinary lengths to follow their favourite teams and players.

That was on full display in Kanjoor in Ernakulam district on Wednesday night when a power cut prevented locals from watching Portugal's World Cup match against DR Congo.

Unwilling to miss the action while also protesting the power cut, a group of hardcore Cristiano Ronaldo supporters gathered at the local KSEB office and watched the game on a mobile phone.

Visuals of the incident aired in TV channels showed the protestors, all young men, sitting inside the KSEB field office and watching the Portugal-DR Congo fixture on a mobile phone.

A group of Cristiano Ronaldo fans gathered at the local KSEB office and watched the game—*SCREENGRAB*

The youths could also be heard inviting the official on duty to sit and watch the game with them.

"Why are you cutting power when people are watching football in TVs in their homes? What is the need to carry out load shedding now when everyone in Kerala is watching the world cup?," they said.

An official of the KSEB Kanjoor field office said that a protest had occurred and nothing untoward had happened.

However, KSEB officials refused to comment further on the incident.

The innovative protest comes as KSEB on Wednesday said the state may have to impose limited power restrictions between 6 pm and midnight till 30 June due to a sharp electricity shortage caused by rising demand and reduced availability due to the delayed monsoon — *PTI*

Doctor stabs domestic help multiple times in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

A 45-year-old woman's body was discovered on Thursday on the terrace of a building in South Delhi's upscale Mount Kailash area, allegedly bludgeoned with a bat and stabbed to death by the doctor she worked for, police said.

The doctor, Manish Gupta, was found at the scene and has been arrested. During questioning, he admitted to attacking the woman, named Meena, with the bat and then stabbing her.

The murder has shocked the neighbourhood, coming just two months after an IRS officer's daughter was reportedly raped and murdered by a former domestic help in the same locality.

Police said they received a PCR call around 11.30am, reporting a woman's death on a neighbouring building's terrace.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Hemant Tiwari stated, "A police team rushed to the spot and found the victim dead. A man in his 50s was also present near the body."

The suspect, a dermatologist, had employed Meena for several years. Police are investigating the motive, which remains unclear, dismissing links to black magic.

The victim's family expressed shock, with her son Robin saying, "Someone called me and said she had died," and accused the police of restricting access to her body. —*PTI*

VERSOVA'S 'HOTTEST' SLEEPOVER

A viral video from Mumbai's Versova beach showing dozens of slum residents sleeping on the sand at night has gone viral. Most of the residents are from the nearby Indira Nagar locality, living in tin-roofed houses. Mumbai has also been reeling under water crisis. The water stock dropped to 10-12 per cent of its total capacity as El Niño delayed the Southwest monsoon. As a result, the municipal body has cut water supply by 10 per cent – *SCREENGRAB*

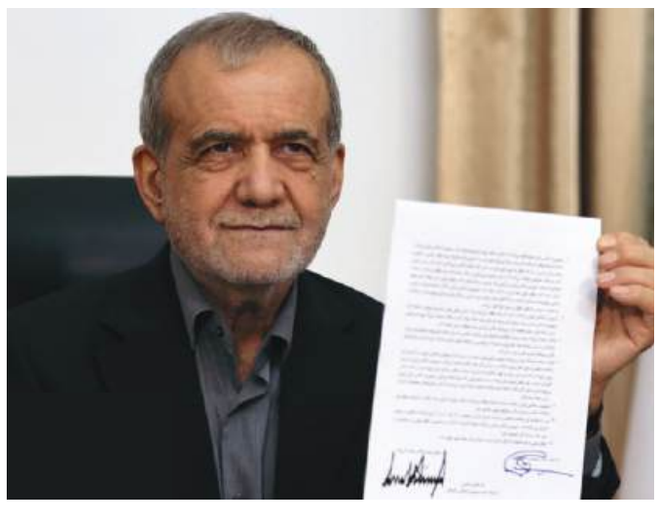
WHAT DO IRAN & THE US GAIN FROM THEIR DEAL?

The interim deal reached by the United States and Iran to end their war will reopen the Strait of Hormuz and bring the two adversaries back to the negotiating table over Tehran's nuclear programme. It will also give Iran an immediate benefit, allowing it to sell its oil freely again, according to details released by both countries.

Besides the new oil revenue for Iran, the two sides are more or less back where they were 3½ months ago — before Israel and the US launched their war, which has left thousands dead across the region, triggered a global energy crisis and shaken the American economy.

Iran and the US will enter a 60-day period of negotiations, and hanging over them will be the question of whether US President Donald Trump can wrest a better deal than the 2015 nuclear accord he scuttled eight years ago.

Here's what to know based on details released by US officials and Iranian state media:



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian holds the signed MoU with the US on 18 June – *IRNA*

GET THE OIL FLOWING

Under the agreement, the Strait of Hormuz will reopen, and the US will lift its blockade of Iranian ports — both of which should push gas prices down. Passage through the waterway will be toll-free for 60 days, and the deal doesn't preclude fees after that, according to US officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to read details of the draft, which has not yet been officially released by Washington.

Iran's closure of the strait, through which around a fifth of the world's traded oil supplies passed before the war, proved perhaps its strongest weapon. It drove up global fuel prices, made food and other products like fertilizer more expensive, and helped push US inflation to 4 per cent ahead of this fall's midterm congressional elections.

With the deal in place, the Islamic Republic has survived the most serious attempt ever by Israel and the US to topple its government, despite the thundering opening volleys of the war that killed Iran's supreme leader and other top officials.

IRAN CAN SELL OIL

The deal immediately waives, but doesn't eliminate, sanctions that Trump imposed on Iran's oil exports, allowing it once again sell its crude on the world market and restoring a revenue stream worth billions.

Last year, Iran earned an estimated $45 billion from oil sales. But it had only one major buyer, China, and had to ship its crude through a shadow fleet of tankers to elude sanctions, eating into its profits. Under the blockade since April, its exports have nearly ground to a halt.

With the waiver, Iran will likely be able to find more customers and sell its oil for higher prices.

IRAN GOT PROMISES

The draft agreement calls for Iran's highly enriched uranium to be "downblended" — or diluted — under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, without elaborating. Negotiations on any other restrictions on Tehran's nuclear program lie ahead.

Trump withdrew from a previous nuclear deal with world powers, criticising it for giving a huge windfall to Iran. But the interim deal outlines even more lucrative incentives if Iran reaches a new nuclear agreement.

One is the eventual lifting of all international sanctions, which would seem to go further than the 2015 accord. That agreement lifted sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme but kept others in place over what the US alleged were Tehran's support for terrorism and rights abuses.

The interim pact also promises a $300 billion fund for postwar reconstruction. It's not clear where that money will come from — but Trump said the US would not contribute.

To give a sense of the extraordinary scale of the fund, the World Bank estimates that Syria, after 13 years of civil war, needs $215 billion for reconstruction; the Gaza Strip, largely flattened in two years of war between Israel and Hamas, needs $53 billion.

The deal also promises to unfreeze billions of dollars worth of Iranian assets held abroad under a procedure the two sides will work out.

WHAT'S NOT ON TABLE

The Trump administration said its war aims were to "obliterate" Iran's missile arsenal, "sever its support" for armed proxies in the region, "annihilate its navy," and ensure it never acquires a nuclear weapon.

The seven weeks of US-Israeli bombardment are believed to have heavily damaged Iran's missile arsenal and production facilities. Meanwhile, Iran's ties with its militant proxies — Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen and Shiite militias in Iraq — appear as strong as ever.

Neither the missile arsenal nor Iran's support for its allies appears to be on the table in the upcoming negotiations.

WAR IN LEBANON

The deal calls for an end to the war in Lebanon, where Israel has been fighting Hezbollah.

However, Israel and Hezbollah aren't parties to the agreement. Iran insists Israel must withdraw from the large swath of southern Lebanon it is occupying, but the interim deal doesn't explicitly require that and only ensures Lebanon's "territorial integrity."

Israel has vowed to keep troops in Lebanon, while Hezbollah says it is committed to resisting Israel.

ALL BOILS DOWN TO FINAL AGREEMENT

The 2015 agreement negotiated by the Obama administration severely limited Iran's nuclear program for 15 years. During that period, Iran could only enrich uranium to a low level, far below what's needed for a weapon. It could only stockpile 300 kilograms (660 pounds) of the material and had to sharply reduce its centrifuges carrying out enrichment. It was also put under stricter inspections by the IAEA. One main criticism was the 15-year time limit, after which opponents said Iran would be able to quickly ramp up its ability to produce a bomb. Iran insists its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.A key question now will be whether the US can win stricter limits for a longer term. —*PTI*

SALAR

Vaibhav's outburst shows why crisis training matters

As Vaibhav Soorya vanshi's aura grows, sledging would be a routinely used tactic to unsettle him and the young Indian batting star will need "situation management" training to avoid losing composure like he did during a recent India A game in Sri Lanka, according to experts.

The 15-year-old is currently the most talked about teenager in international cricket and as his footprint on the game becomes bigger, opposition teams will try to touch some raw nerves to distract him. A prominent psychologist said the power-hitter needs to be prepared to tackle the situation.

"I have had the opportunity of working with Vaibhav at National Cricket Academy 2-3 years back, along with a group of under-16 boys and he is a calm boy. So, the BCCI and the NCA (now Centre of Excellence), headed by VVS Laxman, already understand the importance of it and that is why players are profiled in sports psychology services whenever there are camps," Dr Swaroop Savanur, a prominent sports psychologist in India, told PTI.

Apart from BCCI and the Centre of Excellence, Savanur has worked with Punjab Kings in the IPL, various domestic teams such as Vidarbha and the India Under-17 football team.

Sooryavanshi grabbed headlines for reacting aggressively to sledging by the Sri Lanka A players in a close match that India A lost in Dambulla recently. Savanur said while talent is the major contributor to a player's growth, mind control too is crucial for big achievements.

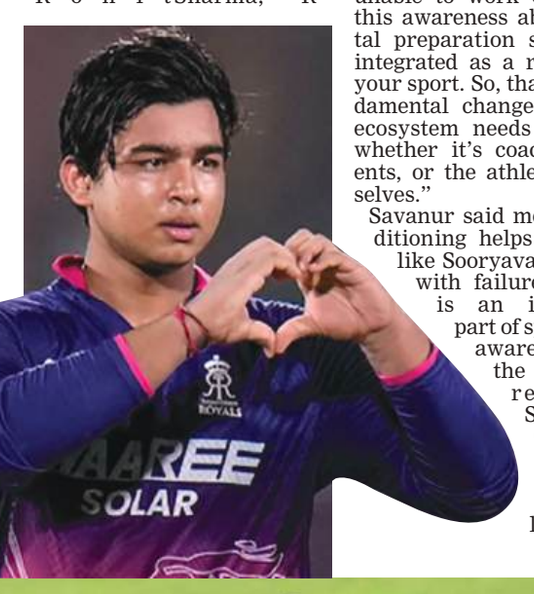
"To help the players slowly understand their mindset and slowly develop a way to work on it. I have conducted 18-19 high performance camps for young cricketers at the CoE even when Rahul Dravid was heading it. Now, it has become a standard practice," Savanur said.

"But more work needs to be done because we see so many wonderful players at the under-19 level. But they are unable to see that kind of success when they are going at the senior level. The talent was there, the intention was there, the technique and workmanship was there," he lamented.

Savanur stressed on the need to develop "situational intelligence".

"If it does not get developed, then unfortunately the talent does not get expressed at all. So whether Vaibhav has it or not is not a question. It's more about understanding the personality behind him, and then working on it," he added.

The Indian cricket team is in a transition phase, and a slew of young cricketers are trying to cement their place after the retirements of stalwarts like Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, R Ashwin, and Ravindra Jadeja from various formats.



A former senior national selector underscored the significance of mental preparation.

"They should be given proper counselling by the BCCI, and the team management should sit down with the newcomers and take them into confidence, saying stuff like 'don't hurry yourself' and 'we are behind you'. It will calm a lot of nerves and prepare them for a bigger stage," he said.

Savanur agreed, and said the sporting eco-system needs to have empathy to bridge the gap between potential and performance.

"Everybody says sports is 90 per cent mental game. So, the awareness is there. But the awareness is still in a very skewed manner. I think the sporting ecosystem is looking at it as a problem-solution approach, that having mental challenges in sports, having pressure and anxiety is somehow a problem.

"And that is the reason why people are, although wanting to work on it, still unable to work on it. So, this awareness about mental preparation should be integrated as a routine in your sport. So, that is a fundamental change that the ecosystem needs to have, whether it's coaches, parents, or the athletes themselves."

Savanur said mental conditioning helps a player like Sooryavanshi cope with failures, which is an inevitable part of sport. That awareness and the resultant restraint, Savanur said, becomes visible gradually. —*PTI*

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi was involved in a heated altercation with a Sri Lanka A player –*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Consent & crassness: Stand-up comedy is under scanner, again

One comedy show where an audience member says Rs 370 spent on biryani entitles him to sexual intimacy and describes in graphic detail his advances on an unwilling woman. Another where a stand-up comic centres his jokes on "cuddling after rape", necrophilia and rapist-murderers. All of this plays out to raucous laughter.

The audience is predominantly male. The subtext misogyny. The issues those of consent, normalising rape culture and trivialising sexual assault and murder.

Videos from the two performances, the first and more recent from Pranit More and the second from an earlier show by Madhur Virli, have become the centre of furious debate over where and how the lines should be drawn.

Two-time Academy award winning British actor Peter Ustinov once termed comedy "a funny way of being serious". Stand-up comics have never been far from the headlines given the very nature of their jobs – to provoke uncomfortable laughs.

Often the toast of many circles for their satirical take on contemporary issues, some Indian comics thriving in today's stand-up ecosystem seem to have dropped the funny, leaving behind only controversy. And need for introspection on what constitutes humour.

"Whatever little progress activists make, these videos and crass jokes drag us back to square one. When something as serious as sexual coercion is normalised for laughs and viewed by millions, it sends the wrong message," anti-rape activist Yogita Bhayana told PTI.

"I'm not asking for arrests, but there has to be accountability for what's being said and uploaded. Also, not to forget the audiences laughter these jokes receive. They say far more about society than we would like to admit," she said.

Before the recent crowd work clip from More's set – the one from Virli was shot earlier but found new life with the current controversy – was podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia's lewd remark about parents and sex on comedian Samay Raina's show.

Crowd work is a style of stand-up comedy where performers forgo rehearsed material in favour of unscripted, impromptu dialogue with audience members.

In More's viral clip, what begins as routine crowd work veers into disturbing territory when 23-year-old Himanshu Jangra gets into flow.

"Maine kaha Rs 370 lage hain, main vasool toh karunga," he said. More responded by calling it "peak Gurgaon content" and gave him Rs 5,000 cash prize as a reward for best narrated story while the audience cheered and laughed along.

Comedian Madhur Virli, Pranit More –*PTI*

Jangra then continues with increasingly graphic recollections of his date with girl repeatedly saying 'no' and he ignoring her.

The exchange was later edited, subtitled, and uploaded by More for his two million subscribers. More, in accordance with standard practice, secured Jangra's consent before publishing the clip but chose to completely bypass the larger issue of consent of the woman.

Jangra has since been fired from his job at Gurugram-based Starvik Design for his "inappropriate comments". Both he and More face an FIR from Maharashtra Cyber Police. The NCW has also taken suo motu cognisance and issued summons.

Soon, the controversy took another turn.

Clips from More's "Ladies Special" show resurfaced, showing a medical student of Mumbai's KEM College, Sejal Pawar, cracking jokes on genitalia of male cadavers. Punish her as well, went some on social media.

The college has since initiated an internal inquiry and placed Pawar on 15 days' compulsory leave.

"I have no issue with Sejal being held accountable if she's said something wrong. But the 'she too said it' argument is classic whataboutery and a way of dragging gender into it. This absolves no one.

"Data also shows who has historically made such jokes and at whose expense. Often, the outrage is more about hurt male ego than anything else," Bhayana explained.

Since the outrage both More and Jangra have apologised multiple times.

More said he "deserved this hate" and admitted he should have intervened but didn't, claiming everyone was laughing and he got "carried away," calling it a "lapse in judgement".

Jangra said he regretted attending the show and that parts of his dating story were "improvised" for entertainment.

Virli also apologised after clips from his show two years ago were widely circulated.

"The clip being circulated is from a performance I did around two years ago... I do believe comedy can question ideas and engage with difficult subjects. But certain topics require sensitivity, context and informed discretion. When an attempt falls short, the only honest thing to do is acknowledge it, apologise and do better. This is one of those moments for me," the Delhi-based comedian wrote.

The clips have again triggered wider discussion about live comedy and the format's expanding boundaries, where crowd laughter ratifies content, satire gives way to crudity and fleeting stage moments become permanent viral material.

Several comedians distanced themselves from the row. Many also questioned the very idea of crowd work as a format.

Comedian Kunal Kamra, no stranger to controversy himself for his political jokes, said on X, "Things comedians should stop hiding behind 1. Storytelling. 2. Crowd Work. 3. Hard Work. 4. Bank Balance. 5. Parents."

Stand-up comedian Devesh Dixit criticised the way crowd work is being used in stand-up today, arguing that the monthly rush for uploads has turned performers into content creators prioritising virality over craft.

In a video, he also questioned the practice of putting a microphone directly in an audience member's hands, calling it a risky choice that can easily spiral out of control.

"Responsibility lies somewhere. I hope everyone learns from this... Personally, I want to apologise if I have ever been a bystander to such crass comedy," he added.

With 63 million views, Samay Raina's comeback show "Still Alive" ranks among the world's most-watched stand-up comedy specials. Both Raina and Allahbadia were also featured on the latest season of "The Great Indian Kapil Show". —*PTI*

Trump is Israel's only ally right now: Vance

Flays Israel as it continues to bomb and occupy Lebanon

WASHINGTON, 18 JUNE

Amid criticism that Tehran was getting everything it wanted in the US-Iran deal, Vice President JD Vance defended the memorandum of understanding. He stressed that Iran would not receive any money or sanctions relief unless it met the obligations set out in the memorandum.

In an extraordinary rebuke, Vance also warned US critics in Israel against "attacking the only powerful ally" it has left – US President Donald Trump. He also lashed out at members of the Israeli government, warning them that "Trump is the only head of state in the world who is sympathetic to Israel at this moment in time."

Speaking to reporters at the White House on Thursday, He said that the US delegation, likely led by him would be heading to Switzerland, but "I don't know exactly when". Earlier reports had suggested that the meeting would take place on Friday.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in his first comments after the deal signing that Israel's military will stay in southern Lebanon, where it has occupied up to 10km from the border to maintain a "security zone", as it bombed its neighbour.

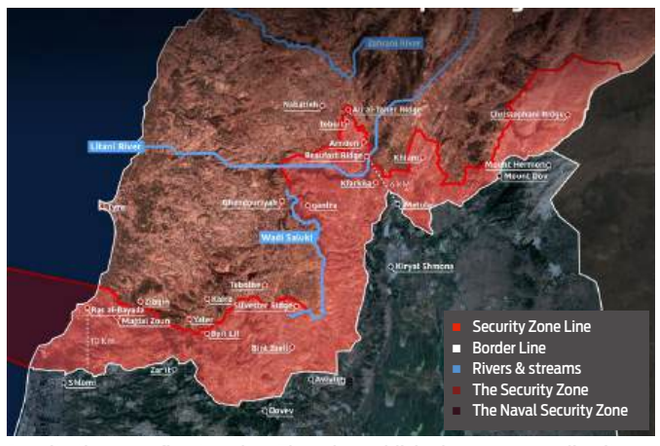
Vance also said more oil is now flowing through the Strait of Hormuz. The Republican said more than 12.5 million barrels went through the shipping channel Wednesday night.

Meanwhile, Iranian state media said that shipping has "normalised" at Iran's southern ports but added that the Strait remains supervised and under the control of the Iranian military and transiting through the vital waterway still requires coordination. Iran's chief negotiator and Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf also repeated that Iran is moving to impose a "fee" system, even though the deal states that there would be no "tolls". However, Vance also said the Strait should be "toll free".

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud questioned this, stating that there was no problem before the war, and no reason for that to change after.

Vance's remarks come after Trump had justified not restricting Iran's ballistic missile programme, something that had been a forefront of the war and what Israel had been demanding. Trump said that if other countries can have such an arsenal, it wasn't fair to Iran to restrict them.

Vance also said that the US military withdrawal from around Iran, as mentioned in the deal, was to "pre-war… status quo", although it wasn't clear what that meant. —*Agencies*



Despite the ceasefire, Israel on Thursday published a map expanding its 'security zone' in Lebanon. Its military will occupy this territory, over 10km inside Lebanon, to 'deter' Hezbollah's attacks —*X @IDF*

Under the Iran-US deal, the Strait of Hormuz should open soon, once Tehran demines the waterway —*TASNIM NEWS*

UAE TO CUT HORMUZ USE TO ZERO WITH PIPES AND PORTS

DUBAI, 18 JUNE

The United Arab Emirates is advancing a multibillion-dollar infrastructure plan to eliminate its economic dependence on the Strait of Hormuz, fast-tracking new pipelines and port expansions following months of regional conflict.

"We're moving toward having zero Hormuz dependency, and that's regardless of whether it's open or not," UAE Minister of Foreign Trade Thani Al Zeyoudi said.

The UAE is fast-tracking construction of a second pipeline to double the crude volume it can export via the eastern port of Fujairah, which sits outside the Strait to the Gulf of Oman.

The broader plan includes expanding the eastern ports of Dibba, Fujairah, and Khor Fakkan, constructing a new harbour, and building extensive rail and road networks.

Saudi Arabia has also shifted its exports to the Yanbu port via its East-West pipeline to reduce reliance on Hormuz.

"The era of one strait, one port, one route is over," said Amer Bin Breik, UAE Ministry of Foreign Trade official. —*Agencies*

WW1, HITLER, AND IRAN: THE COMMON CONNECTION

The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 marked the end of World War 1. It partitioned Germany, dismantled the Kieser's rule, and ensured that Berlin would pay reparations to the Allied powers to cover the cost of war. Now, a century later, the city in France has come back to the forefront of negotiations in what can only be described as a full circle.

The Nazi party denounced the treaty, especially given the global financial crisis. They blamed it for fuelling the economic crisis in Germany and rose to power. The Nazi's subsequent persecution of Jews in Europe then led to a mass exodus of the people to Palestine, and the subsequent formation of Israel by the colonial powers. The push reshaped the Middle East.

After the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, then supreme leader Ruhollah Khomeini hosted Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat. The two shared close beliefs on the emancipation of Palestinian people, which Ali Khamenei then furthered through support for militant groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, reshaping Israel's security policies. Now, Versailles appears to have ended the war Western war in Iran. —*Salar News*

Mexico intercepts drone near S Korea WC training camp

GUADALAJARA, 18 JUNE

Mexican forces intercepted and shot down an unregistered drone flying close to South Korea's training camp ahead of their World Cup match against Mexico, a federal official said. Using specialised equipment, they detected and neutralised the drone; the official, speaking anonymously, did not specify when or if arrests were made. South Korea coach Hong Myung-bo called the incident "unfortunate", adding, "It was right before our practice, so it did not impact us, but it was the most important timing, so what happened was unfortunate."

The security operation involved military and police forces as part of a broader plan for the tournament, which began last week in Mexico City, co-hosted by the US and Canada. —*PTI*

Ship engg booked for 2024 Baltimore bridge collapse

BALTIMORE, 18 JUNE

Prosecutors have filed a criminal charge against the chief engineer of a cargo ship involved in the 2024 Baltimore bridge collapse, accusing him of failing to notify the US Coast Guard of hazardous conditions. Karthikeyan Deenadayalan was charged in Maryland with one count of violating the Port and Waterways Safety Act. His lawyers have not responded. Court documents reveal he was chief engineer when the ship, the Dali, lost power twice, causing it to crash into Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge, killing six workers. The vessel relied on an improper fuel pump without a backup, which was not reported, leading to the accident. The trial is scheduled for October 2027. —*PTI*

Trump to get back military equipment from Afghan; says Taiwan stealing chip companies

EVIAN-LES-BAINS, 18 JUNE

In a G7 speech that largely focused on the Iran war, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday said that he may be able to get back military equipment left behind in Afghanistan after America's disastrous withdrawal at the turn of the decade. Trump then took to his Truth Social and claimed that Taiwan was "stealing" American semiconductor manufacturing companies.

Trump blamed "stupid" former US presidents for both issues, but under him in his "second term (third actually)" (sic), America has become "the most respected country in the world".

On Afghanistan, Trump said at the summit that: "We were going to get out with dignity and pride. Take 100 per cent of the equipment. I was even taking the tents down. But then (former president Joe Biden) got in and they just left. They left all the equipment."

"Afganisthan is kissing my a**," he added.

The Taliban seized power shortly after the US withdrawal, imposed a strict interpretation of the Sharia law, leading to what experts now call "gender apartheid" in the country that had been attacked by both the Soviets and the Americans.

Trump said the issue of getting the US equipment back was "symbolic" as it was largely defunct now, even though the government likely left behind over 3,00,000 weapons, thousands of ground vehicles, and dozens of jets.

Trump then took to Truth Social, and justified his strategy of imposing tariffs by accusing Taiwan and others of stealing US "semiconductor factories".

The self-governing Taiwan has been pressing the US for increased arms sales, fearing that China may soon militarily intervene and take the island it claims as its own. —*Salar News*

US President Donald Trump during a media conference at the end of the G7 summit in Evian-les-Bains, France —*PTI*

'US had 4 weeks of oil reserves left'

During his speech, Trump said that the US would have run out of oil reserves in four weeks had the Strait of Hormuz not opened, a break from his previous claims that the US was doing just fine. He said it would be "bedlam" if the oil ran out. "You know, there are reserves all over the world, and we would really run out," he added.

Lula: Emperor Don meddling in polls

At the summit, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva asked Trump to not "behave like an emperor" and meddle in Brazil's October elections. Trump imposed hefty tariffs on Brazil over the trail of his ally former president Jair Bolsonaro, whose son is a potential candidate. Trump said that Lila sought to arrest "Bolsonaro jr."

UKRAINE HITS MOSCOW OIL REFINERY FOR 2ND TIME IN A WEEK

MOSCOW, 18 JUNE

Ukraine hit a Moscow oil refinery for a second time in a week and disrupted commercial flights at Moscow airports in the biggest drone attacks since Russia's invasion more than four years ago, Russian officials said on Thursday.

Russian air defences shot down 555 Ukraine drones, and recorded 200 interceptions as they were approaching the capital, the Russian Defence Ministry stated. In total, almost 1,000 drones and four Ukrainian cruise missiles were intercepted and destroyed across the country in 24 hours.

Yet, several drones hit the Moscow Oil Refinery on the southeastern outskirts of the city, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. The Russian Transport Ministry said that flights from Moscow's four airports were halted, and 500 flights cancelled or delayed.

An oil depot was struck in the southern Rostov region, where one person was killed.

Seventeen people were wounded in the Moscow region, according to local governor Andrei Vorobyov.

The attack comes as President Vladimir Putin is in Kazan, 700km east of Moscow, hosting leaders of the ASEAN.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had just taken part in the G7 summit and secured commitments from the world's top leaders, and had just spoken to US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanual Macron.

Meanwhile, one person was killed in Ukraine's Sumy, as Russia launched at least 239 drones and seven ballistic missiles at overnight. —*PTI*

40% of petrol and oil products to the Russian capital is supplied by the Moscow Oil Refinery

US to review its forces in Europe

BRUSSELS, 18 JUNE

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth lashed out at NATO allies on Thursday, announcing a six-month Pentagon review of American forces in Europe whose outcome will depend on how fast the Europeans take responsibility for their own security, as he pushed for "NATO 3.0".

"This will be a real review. It will be designed to ensure that NATO is moving… toward Europe.. stepping up to take primary responsibility for the defence of Europe," he told his NATO counterparts in Brussels.

Hegseth lambasted European allies for failing to provide US forces access to bases in Europe to launch attacks on Iran, calling it "shameful."

"They put America's sons and daughters, our sons and daughters, at risk by denying them the predictable access, basing and overflight that never should have been in question at all," he said. —*PTI*

WHEN TRUMP & EL-SISI 'FELL IN LOVE'…

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and I fell "deeply in love" when we met at a "hotel room" for "twice as long as (we were) supposed to" in 2016, Trump said. Trump said that el-Sisi didn't want to meet Hillary Clinton, but "we had great chemistry" and "he's a great friend of mine". He said el-Sisi's meeting with Clinton only lasted a minute.

TRYING TO SAVE MOM

Indian boy dies in NY horse carriage accident

NEW YORK, 18 JUNE

An Indian teenager died while trying to save his mother, who was thrown from a horse-drawn carriage after the horse bolted at New York City's famous Central Park.

Romanch Mahajan, 18, was on his first trip to New York with his family when the incident took place on Wednesday, The New York Times reported.

The driver stopped to take a family picture, and the horse suddenly bolted, while the driver raced behind.

"We were yelling, 'Help me, help me!" Romanch's father Deepak Mahajan said. The family clung to one another, but when Deepak's wife, Priya, fell out of the carriage, Romanch jumped down to help her.

The teen hit his head on the ground.

Tatianna Bresler, who works in the area, called 911. He said a witness slowed down the horse.

Romanch died on Wednesday night at NewYork-Presbyterian Weill Cornell Medical Centre.

His family, father, mother and younger brother, escaped with minor injuries, though their carriage shattered into pieces.

The accident is the latest accident involving carriage horses.

- Romanch Mahajan's father, mother and younger brother, escaped with minor injuries

"This is unacceptable. A driver is not supposed to leave the carriage to take photos — ever," Alexander Kemp, a vice president of the union, Transport Workers Union Local 100, stated.

The driver has been suspended by the carriage's owner.

The accident led to renewed calls to ban the carriages. There are more than 100 carriage horses in Manhattan. There had been eight "horse-related incidents" since May 2025, the park conservancy said. —*PTI*

Makerfield polls could shake Starmer's post

LONDON, 18 JUNE

The UK heads to the polls today in Makerfield, northwest England, where about 75,000 voters will choose a new MP. The result could significantly influence Labour's future, potentially hastening the end of Keir Starmer's leadership. **Andy Burnham**, the Mayor of Greater Manchester and favourite among bookmakers, leads the race.

If Burnham defeats the Reform UK candidate and secures the seat for Labour, he is highly likely to challenge Starmer, whose popularity has fallen since Labour's 2024 landslide win. Burnham promises to "change politics" if elected, a bold claim for a man who would be just one of 650 MPs. The campaign has attracted international media attention, indicating this is no ordinary by-election.

Starmer's failed appointment of Peter Mandelson as US ambassador and poor local election results have prompted calls for his resignation. Labour MPs Wes Streeting and Josh Simons have publicly demanded change. A Burnham win would intensify pressure on PM. —*PTI*

Taliban bans smartphones for Afghan officials

KABUL, 18 JUNE

The Taliban has ordered a nationwide ban on smartphone use by government officials, raising concerns about broader restrictions on communication and internet access in Afghanistan. A directive reviewed by the Guardian bars officials, fighters and government staff from using smartphones, warning that devices will be confiscated and destroyed, with violators facing legal and Sharia punishment. Exemptions require approval from Taliban Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. The move follows earlier internet blackouts and reflects Taliban concerns over information leaks and unauthorised recordings of meetings —*Agencies*

NSE files for Rs 30,000 crore IPO, to be India's biggest-ever

NSE flags regulatory, tech, AI, derivatives concentration risks in IPO papers

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has filed draft papers with market regulator Sebi for its long-awaited initial public offering (IPO), estimated at around Rs 30,000 crore, setting the stage for what could become India's largest-ever public issue.

The proposed offering will be entirely an Offer for Sale (OFS) of 14.89 crore shares, with shareholders divesting nearly 6 per cent of the exchange's equity. The issue is expected to surpass Hyundai Motor India's Rs 27,870-crore IPO launched in 2024 and cost Rs 2,000 pet share.

The filing is a significant milestone for NSE, whose listing plans had remained stalled for nearly a decade due to regulatory hurdles. Sebi has granted a no-objection certificate for the listing, subject to completion before 30 January, 2027.

SBI will offload up to 2.48 crore shares, followed by MS Strategic (Mauritius) Ltd with 1.60 crore shares. However, Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), NSE's largest shareholder with a 10.72 per cent stake, will not sell.

In its draft red herring prospectus (DRHP), NSE warned that regulatory changes, technology failures, cyberattacks and risks associated with artificial intelligence could materially impact its business.

The exchange remains heavily reliant on derivatives trading, with transaction charges contributing 78.65 per cent of operating revenue in FY26 and options trading alone accounting for 60.22 per cent. NSE said recent Sebi measures aimed at strengthening the derivatives market had already moderated trading activity and affected revenues.

The bourse also flagged ongoing legal proceedings, cybersecurity threats and concentration risks, noting that its top 10 trading members contributed nearly 47 per cent of operating revenue in FY26. *—PTI*

LIC the single largest shareholder, holding a 10.72% stake, will not offload any shares.

BIGGEST SELLERS IN THE IPO

NSE has 247.5 cr shares. Its IPO will see investors sell just 14.89 cr shares, about 6% of the company. Here's who is cashing in the most:

Shareholder	Shares being sold	% of equity Sold	Estimated value
SBI	2.47 cr	1.00%	Rs 4,950 cr
MS Strategic (Mauritius)	1.60 cr	0.65%	Rs 3,200 cr
Canada Pension Plan Investment Board	1.19 cr	0.48%	Rs 2,375 cr
Aranda Investments	1.12 cr	0.45%	Rs 2,250 cr
Bank of Baroda	1.10 cr	0.44%	Rs 2,197 cr
Stock Holding Corporation of India	1.09 cr	0.44%	Rs 2,178 cr
General Insurance Corporation of India	1.07 cr	0.43%	Rs 2,131 cr
New India Assurance	1.05 cr	0.42%	Rs 2,100 cr
National Insurance Company	60 L	0.24%	Rs 1,200 cr
United India Insurance Company	60 L	0.24%	Rs 1,200 cr

DAMANI AMONG BIGGEST WINNERS

From billionaires to industry veterans, these individuals own significant stakes in NSE. While they aren't selling shares in the IPO, here's how much NSE's top individual shareholders own and what their stakes are worth today after the IPO.

Radhakishan Damani (Dmart)
Shares held 3.91 cr | Stake 1.58%
Value Rs 7,817 cr

S Gopalakrishnan (Infosys Co-founder)
Shares held 94.29 L | Stake 0.38%
Value Rs 1,886 cr

Ignatius Navil Noronha (DMart CEO)
Shares held 30 L | Stake 0.12%
Value Rs 600 cr

Sunil Kant Munjal (Hero Group)
Shares held 1.02 cr | Stake 0.41%
Value Rs 2,040 cr

Siddharth Balachandran (Individual Investor)
Shares held 81 L | Stake 0.38%
Value Rs 1,863 cr

Dolly Khanna (Ace Investor)
Shares held 15.16 L | Stake 0.06%
Value Rs 303 cr

Stock markets end higher for 5th day in a row

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended in positive territory on Thursday, rallying for the fifth straight session, supported by encouraging developments on the geopolitical front and easing crude oil prices.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 254.36 points, or 0.33 per cent, to settle at 77,409.98. During the day, the benchmark hit a high of 77,492.33 and a low of 76,953, gyrating 539.33 points. The 50-share NSE Nifty edged higher by 82.30 points, or 0.34 per cent, to end at 24,168.

From the 30-Sensex firms, InterGlobe Aviation, Trent, Bharat Electronics, NTPC, State Bank of India, and HDFC Bank were among the biggest winners. Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Maruti, and TCS were laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 2.23 per cent to USD 77.78 per barrel. US President Donald Trump signed an MoU with Iran in Versailles, France on Wednesday to end the over three-month war.

However, the sustained decline in crude oil prices and moderation in Indian bond yields could offset inflationary concerns in the second half of FY27, with market participants awaiting further clarity on the peace agreement, Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. *—PTI*

Centre ratifies 8.25% EPF interest rate for FY 2026

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

The government has officially ratified the 8.25 per cent interest rate on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for 2025-26, which is expected to be credited to over seven crore members this month. The rate is determined by the Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the EPFO and approved by the finance ministry. The CBT, chaired by Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, decided on the rate in March, marking the third consecutive year it has been maintained. The proposal was sent to the finance ministry for approval, which has now given its concurrence after vetting. The EPFO plans to credit the interest immediately into subscriber accounts under the new ecosystem, ensuring prompt disbursal. The interest rate has remained at 8.25 per cent for three years, after slight increases in recent years, reflecting economic conditions. Previously, the lowest rate was 8.10 per cent in 2021-22, the lowest since 1977-78. The EPF interest rate influences millions of subscribers and remains a key indicator of the economic environment. *—ANI*

L'Oreal to acquire majority stake in India's Innovist

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

French cosmetics giant L'Oreal will acquire a majority stake in Innovist, a digital-first Indian personal care company. Financial details of the deal were not disclosed. Founded in 2019 by Rohit Chawla, Sifat Khurana and Vimal Bhola, Innovist owns science-led beauty brands such as Bare Anatomy and Chemist at Play. Its products are sold through direct-to-consumer platforms, e-commerce and quick-commerce channels, as well as offline retail stores across India. Under the agreement, Innovist's founding team will continue to run the business and retain a minority stake. The brands will become part of L'Oreal's Consumer Products Division. L'Oreal CEO Nicolas Hieronimus said the partnership combines the company's global expertise with Innovist's understanding of Indian consumers. Innovist CEO Rohit Chawla said the deal would help the company expand access to science-backed beauty products through L'Oreal's global innovation capabilities. L'Oreal India currently operates 26 brands and contributes around one per cent of the group's global turnover. *—PTI*

India-UK pact to help 95% Indians working in Britain

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Around 90-95 per cent of Indian professionals employed by Indian companies in the UK are expected to benefit from the India-UK social security agreement, which comes into force on July 15 alongside the two countries' Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA).

The Agreement on Social Security, also called the Double Contribution Convention (DCC), will exempt employees temporarily transferred by companies from India to the UK, or vice versa, from paying social security contributions in the host country for up to five years, provided they continue contributing in their home country. The move is expected to significantly benefit Indian IT firms such as TCS and Infosys. Around 75,000 Indian professionals work in Britain and over 900 Indian firms operate there. Professionals of Indian origin contribute nearly USD 500 million annually to the UK's social security system, while contributions typically account for around 15 per cent of salaries.

An official said Indian employers can avail of the exemption from July 15 by furnishing a certificate of coverage. However, the benefit will not apply to Indians employed by foreign companies in Britain.

UK Business and Trade Secretary Peter Kyle said the pact will also allow UK nationals working temporarily in India to continue paying National Insurance contributions for up to 60 months, instead of 36 months, without making parallel payments in India.

The broader trade deal is projected to raise UK GDP by GBP 4.8 billion, India's GDP by GBP 5.1 billion and increase bilateral trade by GBP 25.5 billion annually in the long run. *—PTI*

India to import 3.78L UK cars at concessional duty

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India will allow imports of up to 3.78 lakh conventional-engine passenger cars from the UK at concessional customs duty over the first 15 years of the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which comes into force on July 15.

Under the pact, import duties on automobiles will fall from around 110 per cent to 10 per cent, subject to quotas. India will permit imports of 20,000 passenger cars in the first year, rising to a peak annual quota of 37,000 units by the fifth year before tapering to 15,000 units from the 15th year onwards.

India has, however, protected its mass-market electric vehicle segment by excluding vehicles priced below GBP 40,000 from duty concessions. For electric, hybrid and hydrogen passenger cars priced above this threshold, tariff concessions will begin only from the sixth year, with duties eventually falling to 10 per cent by the tenth year.

The agreement is expected to benefit Indian manufacturers such as Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra and Maruti Suzuki by providing duty-free access to the UK market for electric and hybrid vehicles in specified price bands.

Separately, India has secured relief from Britain's upcoming steel safeguard measures. An official said about 85 per cent of India's steel exports to the UK have been exempted, while the remaining shipments will be protected through country-specific and residual quotas under CETA. Imports beyond prescribed quotas will attract a 50 per cent tariff. The UK is also set to introduce a carbon border tax from 2027, which could affect Indian exports of steel and other carbon-intensive products. *—PTI*

POST FIRE

HPCL restarts key refinery unit

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

Hindustan Petroleum Corp Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday said its joint venture refinery in Rajasthan has restarted its crude distillation unit (CDU) after completing restoration work following a localised fire in April.

In a stock exchange filing, HPCL said the CDU at HPCL Rajasthan Refinery Ltd (HRRL) was restarted after repairs were completed.

The refinery has already commenced production of key petroleum products, including liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), petroleum coke (petcoke) and naphtha. Sales of LPG and petcoke have begun.

The restart follows a fire in a heat exchanger stack of the CDU on 20 April.

A major fire broke out near the main unit of the newly built Rs 79,450-crore refinery on 20 April, a day before the scheduled inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The fire in the crude distillation unit – a refinery's main unit - was likely caused by a hydrocarbon leak from a valve or flange in a heat exchanger circuit.

This is not the first time a fire has broken out at a refinery under commissioning. On 30 January, 2016, a major fire broke out at Indian Oil Corporation's (IOC) Paradip refinery's atmospheric vacuum unit (AVU), just over a week before its inauguration by Prime Minister Modi on 7 February, 2016. No injuries were reported even then.

HRRL is a joint venture between HPCL, which holds a 74 per cent stake, and Rajasthan government owning the remaining 26 per cent. *—PTI*

K'taka's Mahalaxmi Bank licence cancelled

MUMBAI, 18 JUNE

The Reserve Bank has cancelled the licence of Karnataka-based Shree Mahalaxmi Urban Co-operative Credit Bank due to its worsening financial position.

The Registrar of Co-operative Societies, Karnataka has also been requested to issue an order for winding up the bank and appoint a liquidator, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in a statement on Thursday.

On liquidation, about 97.9 per cent of depositors would receive full amount of their deposits from Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation.

Giving reasons for cancellation of the licence, the RBI said the lender does not have adequate capital and earning prospects and does not comply with certain provisions of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

"The bank with its present financial position would be unable to pay its present depositors in full," it said, and added continuation of the bank will be prejudicial to the interests of its depositors.

Consequent to the cancellation of its licence, Shree Mahalaxmi Urban Co-operative Credit Bank, located in Gokak (Karnataka), has been prohibited from conducting the business of 'banking' which includes, among other things, acceptance of deposits and repayment of deposits, from Thursday. *—PTI*

SBI to raise Rs 60K cr in FY27 via bonds

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

State Bank of India (SBI) on Thursday said its board has approved a proposal to raise up to Rs 60,000 crore in the current fiscal through the issue of debt instruments.

The funds would be raised either in rupee and /or any other convertible currency by issue of debt instruments like long-term bonds, Basel III-compliant Additional Tier 1 Bonds and Basel III compliant Tier 2 Bonds.

The funds would be raised through public offer or private placement mode to Indian and /or overseas investors during FY27, SBI said in a regulatory filing. Shares of SBI were trading at Rs 1,040.25, up 1.39 per cent over previous close on BSE. *—PTI*

TRUMP MAKES ANNOUNCEMENT

Apple & Intel partner to build chips in US

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

US President Donald Trump confirmed that Apple is going to partner with Intel to design and manufacture its chips in US. He announced this on his Truth Social platform and added that it is not just important to design chips but to build them locally as well.

Trump also said that the US helped Intel by buying 10 per cent equity in the chip maker and the company's overall valuation has gone up to USD600 billion from USD100 billion. Consequently, the US government's stake has risen to over USD60 billion in just nine months.

He said that America needs to get its semiconductor industry back accusing other presidents for "letting Taiwan and others to steal our semiconductor factories".

US President Donald Trump said the US helped Intel by buying 10% equity and the company's valuation has gone up to $600B from $100B – *AI*

The move will lead to diversification for Apple that heavily relies on Taiwan Semicon ductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the world's biggest chip foundry, to manufacture its advanced chips.

According to a WSJ report in May, the two companies had reached a preliminary agreement in May.

The AI supply chain is critical especially in a volatile geopolitical environment and the US has been trying to secure critical materials and other layers of the supply chain to cut down reliance on China.

"First, we helped bring in Nvidia, and they agreed to build their first level Chips with Intel," Trump said in the Truth Social post adding that Elon Musk also agreed to build the TerraFab in America.

Intel is making its most advanced chip node 18A-P signaling customers that the chip maker is ready for cutting-edge innovation needed for advanced chips. *—ANI*

Apple phones may get costlier as chips get pricier

CALIFORNIA, 18 JUNE

Apple is planning to increases the prices of its phones as the cost of memory chips has increased, outgoing chief executive Tim Cook said. He told the Wall Street Journal that "unsustainable" situation around memory chips has made price increase "inevitable".

It is unclear of the prices will be hiked for iPhone 18, which is set to release in September. "We're doing our best to mitigate the huge increases that are being passed to us, and we've been trying to shield our customers from the increases, but the situation has become unsustainable," Cook told the WSJ. "There's less supply at a time when consumers want devices and the memory guys are passing along huge price increases," said Cook.

Memory chips are key parts of phones. They act as "brain's short-term and long-term memory" for virtually all smart devices. Rising AI demand has driven up the prices, and so has the war in Iran, which has disrupted the global supply of helium. The gas is key in making semiconductors. *—Agencies*

Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo and Congo's Chancel Mbemba jump for the ball during the World Cup Group K soccer match between Portugal and Congo in Houston
—PTI

Ronaldo's Portugal held to a 1-1 draw by Congo

Congo played World Cup for the first time in 52 years

HOUSTON, 18 JUNE

Cristiano Ronaldo and his Portugal teammates were surprisingly held to a 1-1 draw by Congo on Wednesday in their opening match at the World Cup.

Congo, which was playing at the World Cup for the first time in 52 years, became the second African nation to make a strong start in the tournament against European competition following Cape Verde's 0-0 draw with Spain on Monday.

"The World Cup is a tournament where this happens," said Portugal coach Roberto Martínez, a Spaniard who coached Belgium to the semifinals at the 2018 tournament. "At times the performance is not up to the challenge."

Playing in front of a crowd of 68,777 spectators at NRG Stadium, which was mostly filled with Portugal supporters, Congo earned its first point at the World Cup after losing all three of its previous matches.

Many Congolese were prevented from travelling to the United States for this year's tournament because of restrictions tied to Ebola. "There was not enough blue in the stands, but the players are tough and they know how to overcome challenges," Congo coach Sébastien Desabre said. "But I'm sure that many Congolese people are proud of their team today."

João Neves gave Portugal an early lead in the sixth minute. The 5-foot-7 midfielder headed in a cross from Pedro Neto. But Yoane Wissa equalized for Congo with a header in stoppage time at the end of the first half off a cross from Arthur Masuaku, delighting the small pockets of blue-clad fans. It was the first World Cup goal for Congo in its history.

"It's crazy," Wissa said. "Fifty-two years later we are here, we are back. It's been long, it's been difficult. So scoring that goal, it means a lot for all Congolese, for me, for my family, for the fans who showed up today. *—PTI*

Ronaldo scripts history as oldest outfield starter in WC

Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo has set a new FIFA World Cup record by becoming the oldest outfield player to start a match in the tournament's history, aged 41 years and 132 days, during his side's clash against DR Congo in the FIFA World Cup 2026 on Wednesday.

Ronaldo broke the previous record held by Canada's Atiba Hutchinson, who had started a World Cup match at 39 years and 296 days against Croatia during the 2022 edition, according to FotMob.

The Portugal forward achieved the milestone as he was named in the starting XI against DR Congo, extending his remarkable longevity and continuing presence at the highest level of international football.

Additionally, Ronaldo has also become only the second men's player in history to feature in six FIFA World Cups, joining Argentina's Lionel Messi in the elite list.

Ronaldo first featured at the 2006 World Cup in Germany, followed by successive editions in 2010 (South Africa), 2014 (Brazil), 2018 (Russia), 2022 (Qatar), and 2026 (North America), consistently representing Portugal across two decades at the highest level. *—ANI*

IVORY COAST STRIKER WAHI BARRED AMID MATCHFIXING PROBE

NEW YORK, 18 JUNE

Ivory Coast striker Elye Wahi, who is being investigated into suspected match-fixing, has not been authorized to travel to Canada for his team's next World Cup match against Germany, the Ivorian soccer federation said on Thursday.

Ivory Coast faces Germany on Saturday in Toronto. The federation said Wahi will not be able to travel with the squad because "the necessary administrative authorizations for his entry into Canadian territory could not be obtained at this stage."

Wahi started in attack for Ivory Coast when it beat Ecuador 1-0 in its opening game in Philadelphia on Monday. He will remain in the United States pending the team's return, the federation said.

The French soccer league said on Wednesday that an "unusual amount of bets" were placed internationally on Wahi receiving a yellow card during a Ligue 1 game with Nice in May.

The French league said it passed this information to relevant police and gambling authorities, as well as the French Football Federation.

Asked whether Wahi was questioned by police, the Marseille prosecutor's office told the Associated Press that "a 23-year-old professional football player, competing in France's Ligue 1 championship, was arrested on 29 May, as part of their investigation." *—PTI*

LUIS DÍAZ SPARKS COLOMBIA TO 3-1 WIN OVER UZBEKISTAN

MEXICO CITY, 18 JUNE

Colombia arrived at the World Cup with dreams of redemption after missing out on Qatar in 2022. Although it was tense at times, the Cafeteros got off to a strong start.

Luis Díaz had a goal and an assist in his debut on soccer's biggest stage, sparking Colombia to a 3-1 win over Uzbekistan on Wednesday night. "That's what we came here to do. It's very important to win this first game. We controlled the first half, but they played better in the second," said Díaz, who plays for Bayern Munich.

Daniel Muñoz, also playing in his first World Cup, opened the scoring in the 40th minute after a pass from Díaz, who scored the tiebreaking goal in the 65th when his strike from close range deflected off the hands of diving goalkeeper Utkir Yusupov and trickled across the line.

"We knew that it was going to be a tough match," Colombia coach Nestor Lorenzo said.

Fayzullaev Abbosbek scored in the 60th minute for Uzbekistan, which made its World Cup debut in front of a heavily pro-Colombia crowd of 80,824 at Estadio Azteca.

"It is a wonderful joy, but emotionally, I think it weighed on some of the players who suffered physically," Lorenzo said. "It has to do with the emotional burden generated by the opening match and the setting in which we played — especially since we were expected to take the initiative and were under pressure to win." *—PTI*

Kane makes most of leading England

ARLINGTON, 18 JUNE

Harry Kane has already made the most of another opportunity in this World Cup. Given a second penalty kick, he didn't miss.

The hope now for England and its captain is this is just the start of a long run and another chance to seek a championship after bitter losses ended their last two appearances.

That successful retry on a penalty kick was the first of Kane's first two goals as England won its World Cup opener 4-2 Wednesday over Croatia, the team that knocked the Three Lions out in the 2018 semifinals.

After scoring his goals in the first half, the second a powerful header, Kane was the first person to jump on the back of Jude Bellingham after his tiebreaking goal early in the second half put England ahead for good. Then in the 94th minute, there was Kane in front of his own net on a set play, blocking a close-range shot by Croatia.

"See the commitment of our captain, our No. 9," coach Thomas Tuchel said. "Complete performance, absolute leader and he's all in. He's all in physically, he's all in mentally. ... He's the full package. He wants it, and he leads by example."

Kane's goals pushed his World Cup total to 10 and matched the English record that Gary Lineker set playing in the 1986 and 1990 tournaments. Kane, who won the Golden Boot in 2018 in Russia by scoring six times, is the first player from England to score multiple goals in three Cup appearances. He has 81 international goals.

"Obviously it's a great milestone to reach, to get 10 goals in a World Cup. ... To reach double figures in this amazing tournament is very special," Kane said. *—PTI*

Qatar fans get govt-funded trip

Qatar brought a cheering section to the World Cup by treating a large contingent of supporters to an all-expenses-paid trip to North America. Some 1,000 Qatari fans have descended on Vancouver, via jets chartered by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, ahead of Thursday's match against Canada.

The fans are staying at posh hotels, including the Fairmont and the JW Marriott Parq. "First of all I would like to thank everyone who went the extra mile and made the journey out here," captain Abdulaziz Hatem said. Qatar's Social and Sport Contribution Fund partnered with the Persian Gulf nation's soccer federation to pay for the "Qatari Fans Delegation Program" for the World Cup. The fund covers flights, hotels and local transportation and other perks. *—PTI*

—PTI

BCCI eyes 10 March to 15 May window for next IPL

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

In its bid to beat the extreme May heat in most parts of the country, the BCCI is contemplating an early start to the IPL, eyeing a 10 March to 15 May window for future editions starting next year, Board secretary Devajit Saikia has said.However, he made it clear that due to international calendar constraints, the number of matches will remain 74 and not be increased to 94. The IPL usually gets underway in the last week of March and winds up towards the end of May. Saikia said an early IPL would protect the interest of both players as well as the paying public.

"This year, IPL started around the 29th March and it was over by 31 May. Only thing which we are discussing is that during the fag end of the tournament after 15 May... there is apprehension of having rainfall or pre-monsoon season starting. "On the other hand, there is hot weather which is not very conducive either for the players or for the crowds," Saikia said. *—PTI*

Neeraj to clash with rising Lankan star Pathirage

DOHA, 18 JUNE

Indian javelin throw superstar Neeraj Chopra hopes that his lengthy injury-forced absence from competition would not affect his rhythm when he returns to action against an in-form line-up of heavyweight rivals in the familiar environs of the Doha Diamond League here on Friday.

The top-class field here would include rising Sri Lankan star Rumesh Tharanga Pathirage, who surpassed the 90m mark a few days ago. The 28-year-old Chopra, on the other hand, has

been recuperating from a back injury which has prevented him from competing since World Championships last September. He had finished eighth with a below-par throw of 84.03m, but he will be hoping to hit his stride straightaway at the Qatar Sports Club. *—PTI*

India beat Uruguay 3-2 to top pool in Women's Nations Cup

AUCKLAND, 18 JUNE

India bounced back after conceding an early goal to beat Uruguay 3-2 and finish at the top of Pool A in the FIH Women's Nations Cup New Zealand, here on Thursday.

Deepika netted twice while Deepika Soreng found the back of the net once as India recorded a third consecutive victory in the tournament, having earlier defeated USA and Japan.

USA finished second and joined India in the semifinals. India are set to take on the winner of the contest between Chile or Korea on 20 June in the semifinal.

In the 13th minute of the contest, India were put on the backfoot after Chiara Appennino converted a penalty corner to put Uruguay ahead in the contest.

India did not have to wait long for an equaliser as drag-flicker Deepika converted a penalty corner in the 24th minute to make it 1-1.

Soreng turned the momentum towards India, putting them ahead 2-1, when she produced a fine field goal in the 43rd minute of the contest heading into the final quarter.

Uruguay found an equaliser through skipper Manuela Vilar, who struck in the 55th minute but their joy was short lived as Deepika scored her second goal of the contest in the next minute. The contest also marked a memorable moment for Neha who completed her 200th appearance. *—PTI*

Manika Batra dropped from Asian Games squad

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

India's most recognisable table tennis star, Manika Batra, was on Thursday dropped from the national squad for this year's Asian Games as she did not meet the selection criteria set by the TTFI.

Manika's exclusion is down to her absence from domestic events because of which she does not feature in the Table Tennis Federation of India's (TTFI) rankings.

The 20th Asian Games will be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan from 19 September ro 4 October. She is part of the reserves with Swastika Ghosh.

Manika, who has won atCommonwealth Games and a historic mixed doubles bronze at the 2018 Asian Games, is currently India's second highest-ranked female player at 51, behind Sreeja Akula who is 45th in the latest ITTF (International Table Tennis Federation) rankings. TTFI selects players based on international and national rankings.

"The selection process ensured that India's highest-ranked and most consistent performers earned the opportunity to represent the country at Asia's biggest multi-sport event," said TTFI.

The Asian Games table tennis events will be held between 20 to 28 September. *—PTI*

15-YEAR-OLD WONDER

BCCI wants Sooryavanshi's parents on tour to help him blend in

NEW DELHI, 18 JUNE

A 15-year-old schoolboy needs to be eased into a senior team set-up, said BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia as he explained the Board's decision to allow Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's parents to accompany him on the white-ball tour of Ireland and England later this month.

The big-hitting Sooryavanshi, who has earned his maiden call-up in the Indian T20 set-up, has been selected for seven games (two vs Ireland and five vs England) on the tour which begins on 26 June in Belfast.

"You see, not all national teams at the senior level have a 14 or 15-year-old in their squad. After many decades, we have someone like Vaibhav Sooryavanshi," Saikia told PTI.

"At one point in time, it was Sachin Tendulkar (16 and half at time of Test debut) who made it to the national team at such a young age. When such a young kid is part of the senior team, there

are obviously a lot of issues that can crop up," he added without elaborating.

"Therefore, to make him comfortable and help him get used to an adult environment, where all the other players are above 18 years of age, and the team management members are also adults, we felt it would be helpful," Saikia, a former Ranji Trophy player for Assam, stated further. "We are doing this because we believe it will ease a lot of issues as far as Vaibhav is concerned."

Saikia cited the example of how senior teachers accompany students on school excursions. "Even when a school student goes on an excursion, there is usually a senior person accompanying them." *—PTI*